

Written by Paul Purpura, The Times-Picayune  
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The Rev. [Grant Storms](#) , the former "Christian patriot" pastor whose marches against homosexuality at New Orleans' Southern Decadence festival briefly put him in the national spotlight, was convicted of obscenity Wednesday, for [exposing himself while masturbating](#) at Lafreniere Park last year. In his confession, he described public masturbation as "a thrill," but authorities debunked suspicions that he was a pedophile.

Storms, 55, who lives in Metairie, declined to comment after the conviction. Judge Ross LaDart of the 24th Judicial District Court, who presided over the daylong trial because Storms waived a jury, did not even break to deliberate. He promptly found Storms guilty of the [single count of obscenity](#) . He sentenced Storms to three years of probation, citing no evidence of a criminal history.

LaDart also ordered Storms to be evaluated, apparently psychologically. The judge noted that in Storms' confession, he admitted that Feb. 25, 2011, the day he was arrested, was the third time that week that he masturbated in Lafreniere Park.

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"Lafreniere Park is a public place," LaDart said in announcing the verdict. "Lafreniere Park is a place that was chosen by this defendant to engage in a history of masturbation."

Storms declined to testify. His attorneys, Brett Emmanuel and Donald Cashio, did not overtly deny their client masturbated in the park but argued he never exposed his penis. The exposure was a necessary element of the obscenity charge.

In his confession, Storms told Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office Sgt. Kevin Balser he had taken a break from his grass cutting business to sip a beer in the park, where he said he became "horny." He said he put his hands into his underwear, but he never exposed himself.

"Why do you go to the park and do this, as far as masturbating?" Balser asked Storms hours after the arrest.

"I don't know," Storms responded. "I guess a thrill."

"So it's a thrill-slash-fantasy for you?" Balser asked.

"Yes," Storms said.

The incident immediately raised speculation that Storms was a pedophile, because he masturbated with children nearby. Assistant District Attorney Seth Shute shot those allegations down outright Wednesday, saying in opening statements that detectives found no evidence of child pornography on his computer or cell phone, and there was "never a shred of evidence (showing) that Mr. Storms was masturbating to children."

Apparently attempting to explain to police why he exposed himself, Storms confessed that as a grass cutter, he carried a "pee bottle" with him, and on the day of his arrest, he sipped a beer in his van and then had to urinate. He did it in the bottle, instead of walking to a park restroom. However, Detective Donald Zanotelli testified he searched Storms' van and found no bottles

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with urine in them.

Following his arrest, Storms provided an impromptu [press conference](#) for local television reporters, accusing the Sheriff's Office of suggesting he was a pedophile and calling detectives "maniacal" and "coercive." But he admitted to have watched pornography that day and to putting his hands in his pants. "I apologize deeply for my inappropriate, sinful actions," he said tearfully, describing himself as "disoriented and confused."

The press conference came back to haunt Storms, as Shute used a recording of it as evidence Wednesday. "It begs the question: What is he apologizing for?" Shute said.

The exposure appeared to be incidental. Shute's key witness was Maria Soto, an Hispanic nanny who at times needed help from an interpreter to testify. She said she was taking three children to Lafreniere for a picnic when she parked in a shady spot next to Storms' minivan. She got out of her car and happened to see him doing the deed as he reclined in the driver's seat, wearing a hat that partially covered his face.

She said he saw her and immediately covered his penis with his other hand. Emmanuel, Storms' attorney, challenged her claim of seeing the penis, asking her at one point if she had ever seen a man masturbate. She became angry. "That's embarrassing for you to ask me that," Soto told him.

Storms received national media attention in 2003, for his leading his small congregation through the French Quarter during [the annual gay festival](#), Southern Decadence, admonishing homosexuals and calling the city of New Orleans a "prostitute" for allowing the event that generates tourism dollars. A Bourbon Street merchants association at one point went to court to get a restraining order barring Storms and his followers from using bullhorns. National news media converged on New Orleans in 2003 to cover his protests.

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<http://mobile.nola.com/advnola/db /contentdetail.htm?contentguid=aEYUWQO7&rwthr=0>

**LOUISIANA: Rev Grant Storms, critic of Southern Decadence, convicted of obscenity for public masturba**

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