



Former priest, 78, gets 25 years on abuse charges

Judge gives Donald McGuire more than sentencing guidelines because of extreme circumstances of case

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For hours Wednesday, defrocked Catholic priest Donald McGuire listened in [federal court](#)  as victim after victim -- grown men now -- as well as some of their parents described their long-standing sorrow and bitterness over his betrayal.

The white-haired McGuire, convicted by a federal jury last October of traveling to engage in sex acts with a teenage boy, showed little reaction to the testimony. When it finally came time for him to speak, McGuire, 78, didn't apologize but offered that he would pray for his accusers.

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U.S. District Judge Rebecca Pallmeyer, a daughter of a Lutheran minister, was not impressed.

Noting that she can exceed federal sentencing guidelines in only extreme cases, Pallmeyer did just that with McGuire, sentencing him to 25 years in prison as a message to those who would abuse positions of power, respect and love. The federal guidelines called for a maximum sentence of just under 22 years in prison in McGuire's case.

"I want any such person to know the system of justice, and this judge personally, finds it absolutely abhorrent," the judge said of McGuire's misconduct. He committed "a very, very serious sin," she said.

Date visited: November 10, 2015

For McGuire, it marked another chapter in his stunning fall from the pinnacle of the Jesuit order. He had once traveled the world giving spiritual retreats and had even acted as a confessor to Mother Teresa.

But at his trial last fall, federal prosecutors said McGuire led a double life, taking untold dozens of young boys from their families -- many deeply religious -- as his assistants and sexually abusing them repeatedly once they were isolated. He already has been convicted of molesting two boys in Wisconsin and has yet to stand trial for sexually abusing two brothers in Arizona.

Pallmeyer said what made his crimes especially evil was that McGuire had been trusted by parents with "one of the finest gifts God ever gave them" and he had perversely taken advantage of them. The outrage of some of the parents was on display as they turned from the lectern to face McGuire and challenge him.

The father of the Arizona boys, identified in court only as Jim, told the judge he had invited McGuire into his home many times, giving the priest access to one son who was then 9.

"This bastard assaulted my son," he shouted as he pointed at McGuire.

The mother of another victim known in court as "Peter" also turned and asked McGuire for the truth. McGuire stared back with a stoic look on his face. She told him he had committed his acts under the guise of being a man of God, making him "the vilest of traitors."

Still, it was not too late for McGuire to admit his wrongdoing, she said.

"Jesus loves you and longs for your repentance," she said.

Several victims as well confronted McGuire in court. Two men said they had been assaulted by him in the 1960s. Another victim known in court as Dominic, now 23, was still being abused in 2003. They told McGuire his actions had left them depressed, ruined their family lives and crushed their spirituality.

Some wiped tears as they apologized, saying they felt overwhelming guilt for not speaking up sooner. Peter was abused in the months before Dominic.

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"I didn't have the wisdom and foresight to see what would happen to Dominic and so many others," Peter said.

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They feared no one would believe them because of McGuire's status. Even Wednesday, witnesses surfaced for McGuire to tell the judge that he was a good man who helped people all over the world.

Dominic struggled for his composure in court as he told the judge how he had to explain to his new wife what had happened to him in his childhood. After the sentencing had been handed down, though, he smiled and said he hoped other victims of McGuire as well as other priests might be encouraged to come forward to obtain justice and start healing [↗](#).

"I think this case has proved the truth will set you free [↗](#)," he said.

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