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Child Sex Case

Suspended Priest Sentenced

By Zachary R. Dowdy
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Barry Ryan, the suspended and ailing Catholic priest who pleaded guilty to repeatedly molesting a 6-year-old Suffolk boy, said yesterday that he looks forward to his own imminent death as he was sentenced in Suffolk County Court.

Ryan, 56, of Palm City, Fla., is suffering from advanced liver cancer and has just a few months to live, doctors have said.

The boy's family often let Ryan stay with them soon after he was diagnosed with cancer, and he admitted that he repaid the kindness shown to him by doing "this terrible thing."

He told the father of his victim that he begs for the family's forgiveness as he sat in a wheelchair in Judge Ralph Gazzillo's Riverhead courtroom, flanked by attorneys.

Gazzillo, who delivered an impassioned assessment of the case from the bench, said no case "has been more disturbing nor more troubling than this."

Gazzillo gave Ryan to the negotiated sentence of 2 years.

But Ryan is not expected to see the inside of a prison, said Rosamaria Abbate, the Suffolk prosecutor who handled the case. His terminal illness may take his life before the date he is supposed to go into custody, which Gazzillo set for July 7, 2005.

"I've repaid your love with this terrible thing that I've done," Ryan said to his victim's family.

"I beg your forgiveness. I welcome my own death. I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

Ryan, who pleaded guilty to second-degree course of sexual conduct against a child, admitted that he molested the boy during visits to his family's home between May and October 2003.

The boy, whose identity is being withheld, reported the abuse last February.

In court, the boy's father said the memory of the priest's abuse and betrayal of their trust is "present in our life every day."

Ryan was ordained as a priest in 1976 but had been suspended from priestly duties by the Diocese of Brooklyn after he left the Air Force in 1995.

Until last spring, he was a library media specialist at a high school in Stuart, Fla., where he was named Teacher of the Year three years ago.

He took a medical leave of absence in the wake of news reports that he might have been involved in improper sexual activity while an Air Force chaplain in Mobile, Ala.

Suffolk police said that last March he gave them a signed confession and said that he had been

receiving treatment for pedophilia at St. Luke's Institute, a psychiatric hospital in Silver Spring, Md., that specializes in treating clergy.

"Barry Ryan had cancer when he chose to commit these horrible acts against a 6-year-old boy," Abbate said.

"They opened their home to him when he had been diagnosed with cancer, let him spend time there so he could get his mind off his illness, and he repaid them by repeatedly sexually abusing their son. It was the ultimate betrayal," Abbate said.

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