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## **Priest Guilty in Sex Case**

Plea Yields 6-Month Term, Probation in Abuse

By Chau Lam with Carol Eisenberg and Eden Laikin  
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A Roman Catholic priest in East Meadow pleaded guilty yesterday to sodomy charges, admitting that he engaged in sex with a teenage boy between December 2000 and January 2001.

The Rev. Michael R. Hands, 35, resigned from the ministry yesterday and is expected to serve 6 months in the Nassau County jail when he is sentenced on April 23.

The guilty plea by Hands, who last served at St. Raphael's Church in East Meadow, comes at a time of growing concern nationwide about the issue of priests who have had sexual contact with young parishioners. In light of recent sex abuse scandals in Boston, Bishop William F. Murphy of the Diocese of Rockville Centre has said he is reviewing personnel records looking for sex abuse complaints and will turn any over to Nassau County District Attorney Denis Dillon for investigation.

"He's taking steps to try to determine if there are problems here," Dillon said at a news conference yesterday.

Hands admitted in court yesterday that he and the boy, who was 15 at the time, had sex in Hands' living quarters at the church in East Meadow on two occasions in December 2000 and January 2001.

"In that period of time, the victim and myself had engaged in a sodomy act," Hands told Nassau County Court Judge Donald DeRiggi.

Hands appeared calm and composed when he pleaded guilty to all charges in the indictment: five counts of third-degree sodomy and two counts of endangering the welfare of a child. He is free on \$125,000 bail.

Hands still faces similar charges in Suffolk County for allegedly having had sex with the same boy on numerous occasions at the boy's home, as well as at St. Philip Neri Church in Northport, where Hands worked previously. That case is pending.

The boy was not a congregant at either St. Raphael or St. Philip Neri, Suffolk police said.

Hands' attorney, Peter M. Rubin of Rockville Centre, said his client's family was friends of the boy's family for a long time and Hands had been to their home in Suffolk many times.

The sexual relationship between Hands and the boy began in late 1999 and lasted a year and two months, Rubin said.

Suffolk police began investigating Hands last May after the boy's family contacted them, and Hands subsequently was arrested.

Yesterday, DeRiggi indicated that in addition to the jail term, he intended to place Hands on probation for 5 years. If the probation department decides Hands needs to see a therapist, he must comply, DeRiggi said.

The boy's father, who was not in court yesterday, was upset Dillon's office did not notify him that Hands was going to plead guilty. In a telephone interview last night, the father said he was upset with

the agreed-upon sentence.

"I think it's ridiculous," the father said. "A recommended sentence of 6 months in a county jail . . . .No state prison? And 5 years' probation! It's more like a slap on the wrist than a punishment."

Staff writers Carol Eisenberg and Eden Laikin contributed to this story.

[Illustration]

Caption: Newsday Photo/Dick Yarwood - Michael Hands leaves court.

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