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Ex-berwyn Priest Convicted Of Sex Abuse

December 12, 1992 | By Terry Wilson.



A Roman Catholic priest was convicted Friday of charges that he sexually abused a 13-year-old girl in a Berwyn church rectory.

Rev. Robert Mayer, 53, who has been a priest for 29 years and was pastor at St. Odilo Church for 10 months, sat expressionless as Cook County Circuit Judge Thomas Durkin announced his verdict. Mayer is scheduled to be sentenced Jan. 8.

Mayer is the second priest from the Chicago archdiocese to be convicted of criminal charges of sexual misconduct with a minor. In 1985, Rev. Robert Friese was convicted of aggravated criminal sexual abuse and indecent liberties with a child charges for molesting a teenage boy.

Durkin said that although it was damaging to the prosecution that the victim had waited nine months before she told anyone of the incident, he believed her testimony that Mayer had reached into her blouse and touched her breast and then reached under her skirt in January 1991. The girl was in the rectory to deliver a letter from her mother, according to testimony.

The girl's story was bolstered by that of two altar boys who said they had been shocked by statements Mayer had made about the girl in a sex education class and in a rectory recreation room, Durkin said.

``He used every street term there is about sex,`` said Salvador Gamino, 15, of Berwyn, who had been in the class. ``He said she should come in and demonstrate. Father Mayer described the sex acts so vividly as if he were doing it himself.``

Their testimony, Durkin said, became ``the evidentiary millstone around the neck of the defendant.``

On the witness stand, Mayer denied touching the girl and making the statements to the altar boys. His attorney, Patrick Tuite, attacked the girl`s testimony because she did not remember what day the attack occurred and because she did not report it immediately.

He also accused her family of making the complaint so they could sue the archdiocese.

But prosecutors Mark Cavins and Roseanne Pulia argued that the girl`s testimony had been consistent and unwavering.

After Durkin announced his ruling, the victim and her family hugged and began to cry. ``I`m happy,`` the girl, now 15, said outside the courtroom.

Said Rev. James Close, spokesman for the archdiocese: ``This is a personal tragedy for the young girl, her family, for her classmates and teachers, the people of St. Odilo Parish, Father Mayer himself and the archdiocese.``

He added: ``Our thoughts and prayers go out to all who have been hurt by these events.``

Although Mayer is still a priest, Close said Cardinal Joseph Bernardin will not give him another ministerial assignment in the archdiocese. Mayer will remain on administrative leave under archdiocesan supervision until the case is disposed of, he said.

That means Mayer will not be able to say mass or administer sacraments. He is still receiving his stipend-funds from the church to cover food and shelter costs.

Mayer had been accused of sexual improprieties with minors in the past and had been under a cardinal`s mandate not to have contact with anyone under age 21.

Close said that when Bernardin learned that Mayer had had groups of young boys in the recreation room of the rectory in violation of the mandate, he asked for Mayer`s resignation from St. Odilo. Mayer resigned from his post on July 1, 1991, three months before the girl`s complaint became known.

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