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Ex-youth leader admits abuse

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News

Rex Jason Sumner tells a courtroom that he sexually abused two young girls from his church.

STILLWATER -- In a hushed courtroom, with only the sound of a young girl crying, a former youth leader at River of Life Church north of Perkins pleaded guilty Friday to repeatedly sexually abusing two girls who attend ed the church.

Both girls were in the courtroom as Rex Jason Sumner, 31, of Perkins, who was the church's youth leader for about a year until his arrest in December, admitted his guilt on all 10 counts to District Judge Donald Worthington.

Sumner was a former correctional officer at Cushing's private prison who was given seven years of probation a year ago for smuggling a pound of marijuana into Cimarron Correctional Facility.

Because of his criminal record, Sumner could receive up to 400 years in prison for the 10 charges.

However, after court recessed, defense attorney Bob Ward said that under Sumner's plea bargain, "He'll get 20 (years) to do on each count concurrently." Sumner will have to register as a sex offender, Ward said.

Court documents filed with Sumner's guilty plea Friday indicate that he expects to receive a 20-year prison term under the plea bargain. He remains jailed without bail pending his sentencing May 10.

During an interview, the mother of the 12-year-old girl said that both girls were in court Friday because "They needed to see him say `I did it.' "

She said that Sumner's guilty plea would be helpful to the girls.

"People at school know about it; it vindicated the girls that he did it."

She said her daughter was in counseling and noted, "The Lord has been gracious. He has sustained us. The church has been wonderful."

Don Russell, pastor of the River of Life Church, fought back tears as he said after court Friday, "The ones that are hurt are the immediate family, our families. He hurt these children, our children. He's not apologized."

But Russell emphasized, "We're praying for his wife and children, as well as our own."

Asked what should happen to Sumner, Russell said, "I feel justice will be done. He'll serve prison

time."

The church, which has 200 members, has pulled together during the ordeal.

"We haven't lost one family because of this," Russell said. He said the church has a new youth leader who is "doing a marvelous job."

The sexual abuse of the girls came to light when the sister and brother-in-law of the 15-year-old girl found a note that both girls "had been writing back and forth, indicating sex and drugs" with Sumner, an affidavit by Payne County Deputy Sheriff Walter Longan said.

The 15-year-old said "it all started" while she was riding home from a youth rally on March 9 of last year with Sumner when "he took her shoe off and was rubbing her foot" and then her leg, the affidavit said.

The 12-year-old said that while she was camping with her family on Memorial Day Weekend of last year, Sumner was at the campground and that when she was alone with him in a camper he fondled her breasts and she masturbated him at his request, the affidavit said.

Sumner pleaded guilty to five counts involving the 12-year-old girl between May and December of last year; three counts of lewd molestation; and one count each of indecent proposal to a child and oral sodomy.

Sumner pleaded guilty to five counts involving the 15-year-old girl between April and December of last year; three counts of oral sodomy; and one count each of second-degree rape and lewd molestation.

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