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## PORTSMOUTH HERALD

### Judge refuses to suppress statements in abuse case

By Associated Press

WORCESTER, Mass. -- A judge has rejected a Millbury man's assertion that he was seeking religious solace when he confessed to church leaders that he sexually abused three girls and has refused to suppress the statements as evidence against the man.

Daniel R. Ferris, 56, a former Sunday school teacher, citing the so-called "clergy-penitent privilege," hoped to prevent a jury from hearing his confessions. State law prohibits members of the clergy from disclosing confessions made to them in their professional capacity or any conversation made from someone seeking religious comfort or advice.

Ferris is awaiting trial in Worcester Superior Court on charges of indecent assault and battery on a child, indecent assault and battery, and posing a child in state of nudity.

He said in an affidavit that he believed the March 11 meeting at which he made the admissions was "between me and my church."

The allegations against him surfaced earlier that same day during a religious retreat on Cape Cod. Three girls told a minister and layperson that Ferris had touched them in an indecent manner and photographed them in their underwear over a three-year period beginning in 1997.

Ferris was a chaperone at the retreat.

Church leaders confronted Ferris later that day at a Congregational church in Worcester County that he and the girls attended.

The Rev. Sheri Anderson, associate pastor of the Central Square Congregational Church in Bridgewater and one of the retreat leaders, testified in an August pretrial hearing.

Anderson said Ferris repeatedly was told that they intended to file a report with the state Department of Social Services and that the police would likely become involved in the case.

They said the meeting at the church was strictly secular and investigatory.

They also said those present joined in a brief prayer at the conclusion of the meeting, but it was not done at Ferris' request.

In an eight-page ruling released yesterday, Judge John McCann said there was "no credible evidence before this court that Ferris sought religious or spiritual advice or comfort."

Judge McCann also refused to suppress incriminating statements Ferris made to police on March 14, rejecting Mr. Ferris' claim that the statements were made



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