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THE WIRE

## Molester pleads guilty

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By [Greg Rickabaugh](#)  
South Carolina Bureau



AIKEN -- A former Augusta youth minister who admitted to molesting church members on camping trips and manipulating neighborhood boys with money and gifts during three decades received a 30-year prison sentence Monday.

Robert S. Dorsett, 65, of Beech Island, wipes tears from his eyes as friends speak on his behalf in Circuit Judge James C. Williams Jr.'s courtroom. On Monday, the judge sentenced him to 30 years on child-sex charges.

RON COCKERILLE/STAFF

Robert S. Dorsett, 65, of Beech Island, pleaded guilty to 15 sex crimes involving children during an emotional hearing in which the offenses were read in detail to a hushed courtroom. Some of Mr. Dorsett's victims -- who range in age from 9 to 43 -- attended the hearing and asked the judge to keep Mr. Dorsett from abusing more children.

"When I was 10 years old, my parents allowed me to go on a camping trip with him and other kids from our youth group from church," said one male victim, now an adult. "On this trip, I was given alcohol, exposed to pornography and sexually abused by Robert Dorsett. This misuse of power and trust from him has affected me all of my life."

Fourteen friends and family members of Mr. Dorsett attended the hearing, lining up to speak on his behalf. Many were neighbors or co-workers who called him a father figure and hard worker.

But Circuit Judge James C. Williams Jr. was not moved by their comments, calling Mr. Dorsett a "pitiful old man" whose only good deed was pleading guilty and sparing victims a trial.

"You are a sick man, but you are a smart man," the judge said. "You knew 40 years ago that you were a sick man and apparently you took no step to get counseling or deal with your problem ... And I can't see giving you any mercy."

The 30-year sentence makes Mr. Dorsett eligible for parole in 10 years, but he is not expected to be paroled that soon, said Suzanne Mayes, special child abuse prosecutor. That means the punishment may be a life sentence for the 65-year-old man.

Mr. Dorsett, who was a chemist at Savannah River Site, admitted to abusing seven children between 1970 and 1998. None of the offenses was reported to police until 1998, mostly because the children were too embarrassed or were coaxed into not telling, police said.

Mr. Dorsett met many of his victims while he was a training director at First Baptist Church in Augusta years ago.

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During trips in the Royal Ambassadors church program, he would organize shaving cream fights and have the youths shower together, police said. He encouraged them to go streaking.

One of his victims was a man who grew up to become a doctor. He took his own life four months ago after battling depression all his life, according to his sister, who appeared at Monday's hearing, looking directly at Mr. Dorsett as she spoke.

"Dorsett, years ago, you sat at our family Thanksgiving table. You completely conned my parents into believing you were a fine Christian example for my brother and your intentions as his church mission leader were pure," the sister said.

The break in the case came last year when a 9-year-old neighbor of Mr. Dorsett's told his parents the man had placed his hands on the boy's private parts while he was at Mr. Dorsett's house playing video games.

The boy also informed officials that a friend had received a *Penthouse* magazine from Mr. Dorsett. That friend later told officials that Mr. Dorsett paid him \$20 and promised to buy him Tommy Hilfiger clothes in exchange for allowing Mr. Dorsett to rub the boy's feet and shoulders.

During a search of Mr. Dorsett's home, sheriff's officers found a brown suitcase containing X-rated videotapes and magazines along with candy, Oreo cookies and other items he gave the children, police said. Investigators found notebooks where Mr. Dorsett kept track of neighborhood boys and their telephone numbers.

Publicity about his arrest last year led to new allegations by victims who had tried to forget the abuse, police said.

One victim, now 43, apologized in court Monday for not reporting the abuse in the 1970s. The man said the abuse led him to spend the past 17 years helping church youths through their problems.

On Monday, Mr. Dorsett wore a frown on his face, bowed his head when victims spoke to the judge and later wiped tears from his eyes when friends defended him.

Mr. Dorsett spoke briefly before he was sentenced.

"I apologize for my acts. I wish I could turn back the clock and take them back, but I know I can't," he said. "Should I be able to get out of prison, I will take steps to make sure ... that nothing like this will ever happen again."

He pleaded guilty to first-degree criminal sexual conduct with a minor, second-degree criminal sexual conduct with a minor, attempt to commit a lewd act on a child, three counts of committing a lewd act on a child, three counts of disseminating harmful materials to a minor and six counts of contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

The judge sentenced him to 125 years in prison, but all of the sentences will run concurrently with the 30-year sentence on first-degree criminal sexual conduct with a minor.

Reach [Greg Rickabaugh](#) at (803) 279-6895.



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