

Miller admits sexual abuse of children Retired priest pleads guilty before his trial



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The Courier-Journal

The Rev. Louis E. Miller admitted publicly for the first time yesterday that he sexually abused children while assigned to parishes in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Louisville.

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Appearing in Jefferson Circuit Court on a day when his trial on abuse charges was to begin, Miller, 72, pleaded guilty to 44 charges of indecent or immoral acts with another and six charges of first-degree sex abuse, stemming from acts against 21 children between 1957 and 1982.

Miller, who was dressed in a gray suit, white shirt and red tie, occasionally had trouble hearing and at other times remembering events. When asked about a particular charge of abuse involving a student at one of his former parishes, Miller said, "I can't remember the date, but yes, I did the action."

The retired priest, who was permanently barred from public ministry last year, still faces criminal charges in Oldham Circuit Court and has been named in more than 80 civil lawsuits against the archdiocese.

Two of Miller's relatives were among the victims in the case decided yesterday.

"I waited a long time for this," said Mary C. Miller, a niece.

Archbishop Thomas C. Kelly said in a statement yesterday, "For the sake of the victims and for our local Church, I am pleased that Father Louis Miller is pleading guilty and is accepting responsibility for his actions.

"This has been an extraordinarily painful time for everyone involved. I hope that Father Miller's action today will provide some healing and peace for his victims. No child should have to experience abuse of any kind. I want the Church to be part of the healing process for all victim/survivors who have been harmed by any Church employee."

During the hearing, which lasted less than an hour, Miller entered what is called an "open plea" before Jefferson Circuit Judge Ann O'Malley Shake, meaning there is no agreement with prosecutors on the sentence, and he gives up his right to appeal. Sentencing is scheduled for May 27.

He remains free on bond.

Prosecutor Carol Cobb and Miller's attorney, David Lambertus, disagreed yesterday on what the maximum possible sentence is for Miller.

Miller is electing to be sentenced according to the laws in place at the time the offenses occurred and is eligible for probation. Lambertus said in court that he believes the maximum sentence would be 20 years. He did not elaborate on reasons.

"Anything above 20 years is meaningless," Lambertus said, citing Miller's age and health problems.

Cobb said after yesterday's hearing, however, that she believes that Miller could be sentenced to as many as 460 years in prison.

Criminal victims of Miller and other plaintiffs interviewed outside the courtroom yesterday declined to comment on a possible sentence.

"He's going to face a higher order at some point," said Jim Strader, a plaintiff in one of the civil suits. "We're going to be satisfied with what the court does."

All 21 of the sexual-abuse victims in the criminal case are now adults; most have made their accusations against Miller public since last April 14, when The Courier-Journal published an article about two suits in the 1990s accusing the priest of abuse.

Since that story, more than 200 lawsuits have been filed against the archdiocese, accusing it of knowing of abuse by Miller and others associated with the church and covering it up. The archdiocese has denied that allegation.

The Oldham County case against Miller, on 14 abuse-related charges involving eight children, is scheduled for trial June 9. Miller has pleaded innocent to those charges.

Much of yesterday's hearing was consumed by Shake reading a brief summary of the 50 charges and asking Miller whether he admitted he'd done each. For most, Miller simply said, "Yes."

But with a few, Miller hedged.

Miller admitted kissing and licking the face of his niece, Mary Miller, at her grandfather's house on Rudy Lane in 1972, but said, "I don't see where that was an indecent or immoral practice."

Shake deemed the plea to that charge to be an Alford plea after Miller pleaded guilty, but denied his act was criminal.

"He doesn't see that he's done anything wrong to begin with, so why should he see anything wrong with kissing me inappropriately," Mary Miller said afterward. "It surprises me that he



The Rev. Louis E. Miller, right, pleaded guilty yesterday to 44 charges of indecent or immoral acts and six sexabuse charges. At left was his lawyer, David Lambertus.

PHOTO BY PAT McDONOGH

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said that, but he doesn't admit to anything else up until today, so why should he have admitted that was wrong?"

In other cases, the priest said he had difficulty recalling some of the events to which he was pleading guilty.

One of those was the case of Timothy Baker, which involved six charges. Miller said he could recall only some of the actions.

Shake then asked what he remembered and what he didn't.

"I remember these children very, very well," Miller said. "I remember I had a problem. And I remember that I did fondle them at times and there were some times, yes, that they fondled my genitals, not underneath but outside of clothing. I remember that."

He said he couldn't recall the dates, "but I'll say, yes, I did that."

Again with an accusation that he abused Bernard Queenan in 1960, Miller said he wasn't certain about the date, but did admit the abuse.

During routine questions about his legal rights, Shake asked Miller if he was taking any drugs. Miller said he takes medicines to combat blood pressure problems, pain, arthritis and nervousness, but that none affects his ability to think.

Shake also asked about any treatment Miller has received for mental illness. He said that around 1961 "when I was having counseling pursuant to the difficulties here," he was hospitalized at the old Our Lady of Peace for a brief time and again one other time.

He also said he's seen psychiatrists "because of this problem" through the years, and since 1990 has been treated by a psychologist who deals with sexual disorders.

Miller's therapy journal for that psychologist said that in 1961, when allegations of sexual abuse surfaced, Miller asked to leave the priesthood but an archbishop told him not to.

Asked yesterday about Miller's future as a priest, Brian Reynolds, chancellor and chief administrative officer of the archdiocese, said Kelly will have to submit a report on the criminal case to Vatican officials, who could then make a determination about removing Miller.

"Ultimately, it is a decision of the Holy Father (Pope John Paul II) or Father Miller could voluntarily apply for laicization," Reynolds said. "And I don't know whether he'll do that."

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