

# Priest pleads guilty to sexually abusing 6 boys

By JOHN NOLAN  
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NEWPORT, Ky. — A retired Roman Catholic priest pleaded guilty yesterday to sexually abusing six boys between 1965 and 1980.

Campbell Circuit Judge William Wehr ruled that the Rev. Earl Bierman, 61, of Erlanger was mentally competent and entered the pleas knowingly and voluntarily. He scheduled sentencing for June 23.

Bierman pleaded guilty to combined felony charges of sodomy and committing indecent or immoral practices. Eight indictments were issued last month in Campbell, Kenton and Mason counties.

At least one of the victims was younger than 15 at the time of the crime, according to the indictments.

Bierman was returned to the Campbell County Jail under a \$125,000 bond. He wouldn't comment as he left the courtroom.

Commonwealth's Attorney Louis Ball, prosecuting Bierman for the three counties, recommended a total sentence of 20 years. Wehr is not bound by the recommendation, and if he were to increase the sentence, Bierman could withdraw his pleas.

Ball said the counties reached the plea agreement to avoid the expense and time of trials and the trauma of having victims testify.

Richard Strunck, 27, one of at least two people who publicly identified themselves as having been molested by Bierman, said that he



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The Rev. Earl Bierman, center, sat during a court hearing yesterday in Newport with his attorneys Robert Carran, left, and Clayton Shea.

had just turned 13 when he met Bierman in Covington and that the priest molested him many times be-

ginning in 1978. Strunck, who has since moved, said he would prefer a longer jail term but could accept the

20-year recommendation.

"I'm satisfied with that. This is time now for myself and the other victims to get on with their life," he said.

Defense lawyer Clayton Shea declined to discuss his plans for the sentencing hearing. But he told reporters, "I don't think it's a foregone conclusion that he's going to prison or should go to prison."

Shea said Bierman has been undergoing psychological treatment for pedophilia, a condition in which an adult feels abnormal sexual desire for children.

Ball had the judge drop a charge that Bierman threatened a witness, saying prosecutors had trouble proving where the alleged offense occurred. He said the sentencing probably will end prosecution of Bierman unless major new allegations come to light.

He said his office is still trying to obtain church records from the Diocese of Covington for the investigation. Wehr has ruled in the state's favor, but the church appealed and the case is before the Kentucky Court of Appeals in Frankfort.

Bierman worked for more than 30 years in Northern Kentucky as a nursing home chaplain, associate pastor and teacher at Covington Latin School.

He remains a Catholic priest, Shea said. The Rev. Thomas Sacksteder, a spokesman for the Covington Diocese, did not return a call for comment yesterday.