

# Priest to receive counseling in fondling case

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Staff Writer

Backed by dozens of supporters in the courtroom, the Rev. Peter McBride faced sentencing Friday for fondling two female parishioners.

As part of a plea deal, McBride, 61, the former pastor at St. Andrew the Apostle Roman Catholic Church in Clifton was sentenced to at least two years of counseling, some of which will include inpatient therapy at a Maryland-based organization that treats errant priests.

In February, McBride pleaded guilty in state Superior Court, Paterson, to two counts of "harassment by offensive touching" for molesting the women in 1991 and 1992. In the next few weeks, McBride will report to the St. Luke Institute in Silver Spring, Md., to begin treatment. He also paid a \$250 fine.

Passaic County Senior Assistant Prosecutor Joseph Del Russo said McBride may be a good person who has lived a life filled with good deeds, "but sometimes good people do bad things and that's what happened here."

"It's precisely because of Father McBride's standing in the community that these victims were so

deeply traumatized," Del Russo said. "Some people say that these were just fondling cases, but the real trauma comes in the betrayal of trust."

At one point, when Del Russo was commenting on how the victims had lost religious faith because of the incidents, several of McBride's supporters could be heard snickering. Presiding Judge Randolph M. Subryan rebuked them, saying he would clear the court if there were any more outbursts.

The victims were present in court Friday, but did not speak. They did send letters to the judge, explaining how the crimes affected them.

McBride will not be supervised by a traditional probation program; instead, for the next two years he will be required to undergo whatever counseling is recommended by the St. Luke Institute. The organization and the Paterson Diocese will make periodic reports to the judge.

Bob Ayers, who has been a St. Andrew's parishioner for 20 years, was one of more than two dozen who came to support McBride. Asked about the women who brought the charges, Ayers said he "felt sorry for them" and for "what

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Joseph Del Russo  
Senior assistant prosecutor

they believed had happened to them.”

Ayers said the charges had not caused any rift in the parish and that although members may have differing opinions on the case, they support McBride and their new pastor.

“[McBride] is a good natured individual and his lack of bitterness and anger... has encouraged the group to be the same,” Ayers said.

McBride admitted he molested a 38-year-old parishioner by grabbing her and pressing himself against her and by touching her breast on other occasions. He said he molested a 41-year-old parishioner when he touched her breast and kissed her, while helping her put on her jacket.

When McBride was indicted in February 1995, he also faced charges of molesting a 14-year-old



AL PAGLIONE/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER  
The Rev. Peter McBride during sentencing Friday in Paterson.

girl. Del Russo said those charges were dropped because the case was weakened when the judge threw out statements McBride made to investigators. The judge ruled McBride was denied his right to an attorney and his statements were coerced. The girl has filed a civil suit against McBride, who has consistently denied those charges.