

Priest gets 90 days for sex abuse

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KATHLEEN ENGMAN, Legal Affairs Writer

A Roman Catholic priest was sentenced to 90 days in jail Wednesday for molesting an altar boy who turned to him for emotional support after his parents' separation.

Ernie Garcia, 49, a priest with the Order of the Redemptorists, was convicted of sexual interference for sexually touching the 13-year-old.

"It gave me no pleasure, no joy, no satisfaction whatsoever in finding the accused guilty of this offence," Court of Queen's Bench Justice E.A. Hutchinson said.

"He slipped, probably due to human failing, an aberration. He now faces the penalty.

"The fact that there are so many letters in support of the accused illustrates the fact that he holds an important position in society."

A two-inch thick pile of letters was supplied to the judge.

Garcia is to serve the sentence intermittently. He had no prior record.

Garcia's religious supervisor within the Order of the

Redemptorists, Bill Bernard, released a written statement after Hutchinson convicted Garcia.

“We, his Redemptorist colleagues, are saddened by this decision. We respect the decision of the court, but we remember that Father Garcia retains the right of appeal.” The statement also said that the order was concerned about the teen and his family, and offered its support to them.

Garcia has not been allowed to minister since the allegations were made. His suspension still stands. It would only be lifted if the conviction was overturned on appeal.

The sexual touching took place at the teen’s home. The teen saw Garcia as a trusted friend and was happy to see him one morning last year when he came to his house when he was home alone. Garcia asked the teen about his father, who’d left the family. This made the teen cry. Garcia got the 100-pound, five-foot-three-inch tall teen to sit on his lap. Garcia asked him if he was a man yet, and felt his nipples under his shirt. He asked him if he was circumcised, and the teen said no. Then Garcia rubbed his penis over his clothes.

“These events did happen,” the judge said. And they “were not done for the purpose of a medical exam ... or to assist the complainant in understanding the need for circumcision.”

The judge commended the youth’s poise as he stood up to a rigorous cross examination by the defence. Lawyer Peter Royal had argued that the teen’s testimony couldn’t be relied upon. He noted the teen couldn’t say exactly how long the priest rubbed his penis. Hutchinson commented: “Under such circumstances time

could literally have stood still.”