



Aileen Andrews/The Reporter

The Rev. John A. O'Brien, left, former pastor at Church of The Presentation in North Fond du Lac, accompanied by his attorney Gerald Boyle, right, pleaded no contest to a fourth-degree sexual assault charge during an appearance Tuesday in Fond du Lac County Circuit Court. O'Brien was found guilty and ordered to serve 18 months on probation, undergo counseling, pay a \$1,000 fine, and have no unsupervised contact with minors during the duration of his probation.

FdL priest convicted of fourth-degree sexual assault

Sentenced to 18 months on probation

By Sharon Roznik
Of The Reporter Staff

A North Fond du Lac Catholic priest was embraced by supporters as he left a crowded courtroom Tuesday morning after being convicted of fourth-degree sexual assault.

The Rev. John A. O'Brien, 62, was ordered to serve 18 months probation after being found guilty of charges he had non-consensual sexual contact with a 17-year-old boy.

O'Brien appeared in court with Milwaukee attorney Gerald Boyle during a plea and sentencing hearing before Fond du Lac County Circuit Court Judge Henry Buslee.

He waived his right to a jury trial and pleaded no contest to the charges. His attorney asked for immediate sentencing.

"I'm sorry for anything I've done wrong," O'Brien told Buslee. "I'd do anything I can to change it."

In a statement released Tuesday afternoon, Jerry Topczewski, communications director for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, said the misconduct has been taken seriously by the Catholic church.

"There has been no evidence of any other incident involving Father O'Brien and misconduct with children or adolescents," the statement reads.

As a condition of probation, O'Brien will return to the St. Louis Consultation Center in St. Louis to continue a six-month in-treatment program for priests. He had been attending the program as set up by the Catholic Archdiocese.

O'Brien resigned on Oct. 2 after nine years at Church of the

Presentation in North Fond du Lac and entered into treatment at the center.

Buslee also ordered that O'Brien have no unsupervised contact with minor children under the age of 18.

Both Fond du Lac County District Attorney Tom Storm and Boyle said they agreed to the sentencing recommendations before the hearing.

Storm said the victim and his parents, who were not in court Tuesday, were also in substantial agreement with the terms.

"I believe it addresses the seriousness of the offense and recognizes the character of O'Brien and the needs of the community," Storm said in court.

Storm said they tried to reach a resolution that would recognize O'Brien's many years of service and a background anchored in community service.

"He's on his way to mending the problem," Boyle said, adding that O'Brien will return to St. Louis today.

O'Brien faced up to nine months in jail and a \$10,000 fine for the Class A misdemeanor charge.

O'Brien was arrested after a three-month criminal investigation of the sexual allegations conducted by the Wisconsin Department of Justice Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI).

According to DCI reports, the sexual incidents, which involved touching, took place at the church rectory in North Fond du Lac.

The youth had been seeing O'Brien since November 1999 to discuss problems he was having after being involved in a motor vehicle/bicycle incident that occurred two or three years ago.

Boyle said that O'Brien would return to Fond du Lac County, once treatment is completed, to carry out the assignment he is given.