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### **Former R.I. Priest Sentenced to 10 Years for Sexual Misconduct**

William C. O'Connell, Former Pastor of St. Mary's Parish in Bristol, Was Berated in the Courtroom by a New Jersey Lawyer Whose Clients Say the Priest Molested Them

By Elizabeth Abbott  
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Appearing in a New Jersey courtroom shackled and wearing olive green prison garb, former Rhode Island priest William C. O'Connell was sentenced Friday to serve 10 years in a New Jersey treatment center for sex offenders for admitted sexual misconduct involving young boys.

O'Connell, 72, agreed to serve his sentence at the Adult Diagnostic and Treatment Center in Avenel, N.J., as part of a plea agreement reached with New Jersey prosecutors, Paul M. Farnan, assistant criminal division manager for Cape May County, said Friday.

O'Connell pleaded guilty in December to one count of second-degree sexual assault and one count of endangering the welfare of children, both felonies. As part of the plea bargain agreement, more than a dozen lesser charges against O'Connell, including showing pornography to minors, were merged into the two counts.

On Friday, Superior Court Judge Carmen H. Alvarez sentenced O'Connell to 10 years in the Avenel facility, with no parole eligibility for 5 years, for the sexual assault charge, and 5 years in the center, with no parole eligibility for half that time, for the endangerment count. The two sentences will run concurrently, Farnan said.

O'Connell was also ordered to pay a total of \$ 250 in fines into two state funds, one of which benefits crime victims.

In an unusual development in Friday's proceedings, a lawyer representing O'Connell's victims in civil lawsuits pending against the former priest lambasted O'Connell for his misdeeds. New Jersey lawyer Stephen C. Rubino told the court that O'Connell had abused the trust of the children and parents of Lower Township, N.J., where he moved in 1991.

O'Connell hung his head and showed no emotion during Rubino's address, Farnan said.

O'Connell has been held at the Cape May County Jail since his arrest last July 6 on 20 charges of sexual misconduct and obscenity and misconduct involving young boys in Lower Township, a community on New Jersey's southern shore.

As part of the plea agreement, O'Connell admitted he masturbated while watching two boys under age 13 wash his car. He also admitted photographing a teenage boy in sexually explicit poses over a three-year period and allowing two other boys to watch pornographic films at his home.

Formerly the pastor of St. Mary's parish in Bristol, O'Connell moved to New Jersey after serving time in Rhode Island for similar charges. In 1986, he pleaded no contest to two counts of second-degree sexual assault and one count of contributing to the delinquency of a minor for acts involving three teenage boys.

O'Connell served one year in a work-release program for those offenses.

The spokeswoman for a group that represents victims of clergy abuse criticized the sentence O'Connell got in Rhode Island in 1986 and the one he got in New Jersey Friday as being too lenient. Sara Fitzpatrick of Survivor Connections Inc., called O'Connell a "chronic sex offender" who should be permanently banished from society.

O'Connell is the subject of four lawsuits pending in Rhode Island courts, and at least one pending in New Jersey, brought by plaintiffs who say he molested them.