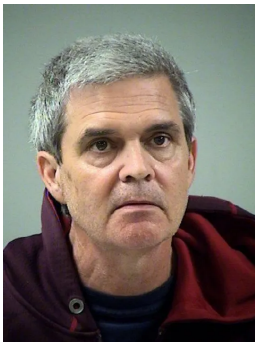


Former Catholic priest convicted in Bee County child rape case, sentenced to 60 years

Eleanor Dearman, Corpus Christi Caller-Times Published 3:46 p.m. CT March 1, 2018 | Updated 10:06 a.m. CT March 2, 2018



(Photo: Contributed photo)

A former South Texas Catholic priest, convicted Wednesday of raping a 13-year-old girl less than a decade ago, will likely spend the rest of his days behind bars.

A Bee County jury sentenced Stephen Tarleton Dougherty to 60 years in prison for aggravated sexual assault Thursday, prosecutor Terry Breen confirmed. The trial began Feb. 20, he said.

He's eligible for parole after half that sentence is served and must pay a \$10,000 fine. The maximum punishment in the case was 99 years or life.

Dougherty, 61, was indicted in Bee County in June 2016.

The victim, who's now an adult, said Dougherty raped her in December 2011 at her grandparents' Beeville-area home. She told police about the assault after a counselor persuaded her to.

After that indictment, a lawsuit was filed 2016 in Nueces County against the Diocese of Corpus Christi, Dougherty and the Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity. They stand accused of not doing enough to protect the victim.

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"The Diocese is aware of the verdict in the Stephen Dougherty trial," the diocese said in a statement Thursday. "In July 2015, the Diocese was contacted by Bee County law enforcement concerning Dougherty and has cooperated with that investigation. Stephen Dougherty has been on leave and out of ministry since December, 2011."

Diocesan officials did not comment further due to the ongoing civil suit, which is pending in County Court-at-Law 3, court records show.

More: [Mistrial declared in child rape case against priest \(/story/news/crime/2017/03/06/mistrial-declared-child-rape-case-against-priest/98821878/\)](/story/news/crime/2017/03/06/mistrial-declared-child-rape-case-against-priest/98821878/)

This is the second time the case has gone before a jury following a mistrial in March 2017.

The woman's rape accusation was the second sexual misconduct allegation the Diocese of Corpus Christi received about Dougherty. The diocese stripped Dougherty of his duties in 2011 after receiving the allegation.

The diocese did report the first allegation, which dates back to the early 1980s before Dougherty was a priest, to Bee County District Attorney's Office "right away" but it was past the statute of limitations so a case wasn't pursued, Breen said.

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