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Glouster priest sentenced to 12 years in prison for unlawful sex with minor parishioner

By Conor Morris Nov 27, 2018



Henry Christopher Foxhoven, 45, is led out of Athens County Common Pleas Court by Athens County Chief Courthouse Constable Bill Butterworth after being found guilty of three counts of sexual battery Tuesday, Nov. 27.

By Conor Morris

A local Catholic priest was sentenced Tuesday in Athens County Common Pleas Court to a dozen years in prison, with no option for judicial release, on three counts of sexual battery related to his having a sexual relationship with a minor who attended his parish in Glouster.

Father Henry Christopher Foxhoven, 45, the priest of Holy Cross in Glouster, will have to register as a sex offender for the rest of his life, and will be subject to five years of post-release control after he serves his sentence.

Athens County Prosecutor Keller Blackburn in arguing for the 12-year sentence for Foxhoven said the priest had "groomed" the victim for three years. Blackburn reiterated that Foxhoven had admitted to the girl's family that she was impregnated by Foxhoven in October (the three counts of sexual battery note that Foxhoven engaged in "sexual conduct" with the minor on at least three occasions since August of this year).

Blackburn, himself a Catholic, said that the victim was failed in numerous ways, including by the Diocese of Steubenville, which he said did not tell anybody in the Holy Cross church that Foxhoven had been suspended in November 2017 for a week for violating the church's child-protection decree for "inappropriate contact with a juvenile" while Foxhoven and the victim attending a wedding together.

"This child has been failed on many levels," he said. "... The church has blame in this. He (Foxhoven) has blame. She (victim) has no blame. They were supposed to protect her. And they didn't protect her."

Blackburn did note the Diocese "did the right thing" by notifying law enforcement when Foxhoven approached the victim's family about her being pregnant, but he said that "wasn't enough."

Foxhoven declined to make a statement during the hearing on Tuesday. Andrew Stevenson, his defense attorney, noted that he and his client were in agreement with the recommended 12-year sentence, though Stevenson did state that members of Foxhoven's congregation at the hearing had attested to him being a good person.

Blackburn responded that other members of Foxhoven's parish are in "complete disagreement" with that statement.

Foxhoven initially was charged with seven counts of sexual battery. As a result of an agreement reached between Foxhoven and the Athens County Prosecutor's Office, he agreed Tuesday to waive his rights to a jury trial and instead plead guilty to a bill of information alleging three counts of sexual battery.

Foxhoven received the 12-year sentence from Athens County Common Pleas Judge Patrick Lang after both the victim and her mother spoke in court in favor of Foxhoven receiving a lighter sentence. The victim and her mother said Foxhoven was a family friend (the mother said she considered him her "little brother"), and the victim, who turned 17 in September, apologized for the pain that she said she believes she brought on herself, her family and Foxhoven.

The victim said she does not think Foxhoven "needed to suffer" by going to prison.

The mother said she "forgives" Foxhoven and said that he helped her family, and denied that Foxhoven had "groomed" the victim.

"I didn't just lose a priest, I lost a friend," the mother said.

Blackburn noted that Foxhoven had a duty to protect the people in his parish, and he failed in that duty. He explained later that under Ohio law, a sexual relationship between a cleric and a parishioner is illegal while the parishioner is under 18.

Blackburn said the state isn't aware of any other alleged victims of Foxhoven's at this time. The Diocese of Steubenville has not yet responded to a request for comment sent Tuesday after the trial's conclusion.

Judy Jones, with the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), said in an email Tuesday that law enforcement should "look at the possibility that this priest's co-workers or supervisors may have ignored or hidden signs of his abusive behavior."