

Monsignor Mraz gets jail time for child porn, apologizes in court



Priest's lawyer worries how he'll handle jail.

By **Laurie Mason Schroeder**
Of The Morning Call

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In a decision that seemed to surprise the 67-year-old Roman Catholic priest standing before her, a Lehigh County judge on Thursday sentenced Monsignor John S. Mraz, formerly of St. Ann Catholic Church in Emmaus, to six to 23 months in jail for viewing child pornography.

Judge Maria L. Dantos rejected Mraz's request for probation or house arrest due to his many medical ailments, but noted that Mraz's crimes didn't rise to the level of what other Catholic priests have been accused of in recent years.

"Any time there is a case such as this and the headlines say 'priest arrested,' there are visions of sexual molestation, which we don't have here," Dantos said.

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· the next 15 years. He apologized in court.

"I express my deep sorrow for what I've done, especially since it's scandalized the good people of my parish," he said.

Mraz, who was forced to step down as pastor after his arrest, pleaded guilty in June to possessing child pornography, criminal use of a communication device and possessing obscene or sexual materials, all felonies.

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**It's not a victimless crime. The more I consider that,
the more humiliated I become.**

— Monsignor John S. Mraz at his sentencing for child porn

He told Dantos that he's seeing a therapist and has learned from his arrest how harmful pornography is.

"It's not a victimless crime," he said. "The more I consider that, the more humiliated I become."

Mraz, whose 41-year career included posts as a chaplain at Lehigh University and a theology teacher at Allentown Central Catholic High School, was arrested in September 2016 following an investigation that began in August of that year.

According to a criminal complaint:

Images of child pornography were discovered when Mraz asked a parishioner to upgrade his computer the week of July 25, 2016. The unidentified parishioner discovered the laptop's recycling bin contained various images of nude males of an unknown age.

Mraz also requested an upgrade to a second laptop, and the parishioner discovered a file link named "naked little boys," or something similar. Uncomfortable with the discoveries, the parishioner contacted the Allentown Catholic Diocese, which in turn contacted the district attorney's office.

Investigators got a search warrant and seized a number of digital devices from the rectory Aug. 19, 2016.

The devices showed internet searches for "Small Boy Nudes," "handcuffed nude boys" and various other terms suggestive of child pornography. The children in the videos were not identified, police said.

Mraz was later interviewed and admitted using the devices to search for child pornography.

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onsignor John S. Mraz

After charges were filed, Mraz was removed from public ministry and was not allowed to present himself as a priest, the diocese announced.

In court Thursday, Mraz's attorney, John Waldron, outlined the priest's numerous medical issues, including diabetes and a heart condition.

"When you weigh his life and his life's work against this crime, his life of service to the church, to the individuals he counseled and said Mass for, he did a lot of good," Waldron said

Mraz entered the courtroom using a walker and left in a wheelchair, pushed by deputy sheriffs. After the hearing, Waldron said he was concerned how Mraz would fare in the Lehigh County Jail.

"I'm truly worried about him," Waldron said. "I really don't know if he can get through six months in jail."

As conditions of the sentence, Mraz may not have any unsupervised contact with children or seek employment that involves children.

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