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The Rev. Earl Bierman was escorted into Campbell County Circuit Court in Newport for his sentencing hearing yesterday.

## Men say priest's sexual abuse scarred them, urge 20-year sentence

By JOHN NOLAN  
Associated Press

NEWPORT, Ky. — Two men testified yesterday that a Roman Catholic priest caused them a lifetime of emotional problems when he sexually abused them as boys.

Richard Strunck and Rick Thomas urged the judge to send the Rev. Earl Bierman, 61, to prison for the 20 years that the prosecutor recommended. Strunck and Thomas said they have undergone counseling because they repressed the fear and anger that resulted from the abuse.

"I'm very angry with him," Thomas testified at the sentencing hearing. "I do not consider this man a priest. The priest takes a vow to minister to God's children — not to molest them.

"I'm not a vindictive person. But I want punishment."

The defense urged Campbell Circuit Judge William Wehr instead to order a lifetime of treatment for Bierman with the Paracletes, an organization of Catholic priests who minister to other priests.

The judge heard four hours of testimony. He said he would sentence Bierman in a week.

The Rev. Robert Wehage, a priest for 22 years who was a student of Bierman's at Newport Catholic High School, testified Bierman was a compassionate diocesan priest and was popular with students as a teacher in the 1960s. Bierman, who retired from Diocese of Covington service in 1991, has problems but would benefit by continuing his psychological therapy, Wehage said.

Bierman sat expressionless in an

orange jail jumpsuit listening to the testimony. He did not comment and was returned to jail.

He pleaded guilty May 5 to charges of sodomy and committing indecent or immoral practices. The charges were combined in eight indictments issued in April in Campbell, Kenton and Mason counties.

Louis Ball, the Campbell County commonwealth's attorney, said other victims declined to testify publicly.

Psychologists testified for the defense that Bierman has a personality disorder, feels no remorse for his victims and cannot be cured, but could benefit from treatment. They said he has considered suicide.

Bierman is addicted to his sexual perversion toward youngsters and must be kept away from them, the psychologists said.

"The best thing for Earl would be to put him in a monastery and not let him leave," psychologist Michael Hartings testified. "That's all Earl has right now — his sense of identity as a priest, his faith."

Strunck, 27, and Thomas, 34, testified that Bierman sexually abused them as boys in Covington. Strunck said he was 13 when Bierman invited him into a catechism group, then molested him for three years.

Thomas said he was 12 and a student at Covington Latin School when he went to Bierman, the school counselor, and Bierman molested him. Thomas said it took him years to summon the courage to report the abuse to police.

Bierman threatened to kill Strunck if he told others about their relationship, Strunck testified.