



JUDICIARY OF
ENGLAND AND WALES

In the Crown Court at Carlisle

R v Ronald Charles Johns

Sentencing Remarks by Mr Justice Singh

19 November 2012

1. You have pleaded guilty to a total of 10 sexual offences which took place between 1983 and 1991, contrary to the Sexual Offences Act 1956, which was then in force. There were three different victims of your offences, to whom I will refer as A, B and C. Some of the counts on the amended indictment are specimen counts, that is counts 5, 6 and 7, and so are examples of a larger number of offences committed against the same victim (A) over a period of time. In accordance with the Crown's request, I will direct that counts 1, 2 and 14 shall lie on the file on the usual terms; and that count 8, which was an alternative to count 3, should be marked 'plea to alternative.'
2. You committed your offences while you held senior positions in the Church of England in Borrowdale, where you moved to become a Vicar in 1979, and Carlisle, where you moved to become Canon in 1989.
3. The first two offences in respect of A (that is counts 3 and 9) were of indecent assault on a male under the age of 16 and were committed between 20 January

1985 and 19 January 1987. It is accepted on your behalf that at least one of those offences was committed after 1 September 1985, when the maximum sentence for such offences was increased to 10 years imprisonment and that I should sentence on that legal basis.

4. Also in relation to A you have pleaded guilty to four counts of gross indecency between 1985 and 1987, at a time when A was aged between 14 and 16. The maximum sentence for such offences was 2 years imprisonment.
5. In relation to B, you have pleaded guilty to two counts of gross indecency, which took place between 1983 and 1985, at a time when B was aged 17. In relation to C, you have pleaded guilty to two counts of gross indecency, which took place between 1989 and 1991, at a time when C was also aged 17. In the cases of B and C, it is accepted on your behalf that what you did was a criminal offence at the time but it is submitted that, when it comes to sentence, the Court should bear in mind that Parliament has since thought fit to equalise the age of consent in such cases to 16.
6. Your first victim was A, whom you got to know from the age of 5 in Liverpool. You were a friend of the family and he referred to you as an 'honorary uncle.' He would sometimes stay overnight with you and you also had sole care for him at other times. The abuse included rubbing your penis against A's buttocks (counts 3 and 9), which took place when A was 15; kissing, touching and fondling (count 4); requiring him to perform oral sex on you (count 5); performing oral sex on him (count 6); and mutual masturbation (count 7). You sometimes gave A alcohol.

7. Your second victim was B, aged 17 at the time. You had helped with B's confirmation when he was 11 or 12. The abuse occurred at his home, which you visited as a family friend. You played a pornographic video and suggested playing a game of 'strip poker.' You masturbated yourself and your victim. Later you got into a shower with your victim and engaged in mutual masturbation before ejaculating. B felt fear and panic. You told B not to tell anyone.
8. Your third victim was C, whom you knew from the age of about 12 and who considered you to be a 'father figure.' The two offences took place over a two day period when C was staying with you at your residence at Carlisle Cathedral. You gave him some whiskey and showed a pornographic video. The abuse included your touching and masturbating C.
9. I have read the Victim Personal Statements from each of your victims. They make clear the continuing impact on them of the abuse they suffered at your hands but also their desire to achieve closure in this case.
10. It is accepted on your behalf that you engaged in techniques of 'grooming' your victims although it is submitted that you never used force. The Pre-sentence Report in your case observes that you manipulated your victims into being abused and describes your behaviour as "predatory." The report recommends a sentence of imprisonment and that it should be long enough to enable you to complete a Sex Offender Treatment Programme.
11. Among the statements which are before the Court is one from the Archdeacon of West Cumberland who makes his statement on behalf of the Church as an

institution and on behalf of the parishes and congregations which have been caught up in this matter. He informs the Court that they have expressed shock, horror and betrayal. A person they trusted with their loved ones has turned out to be an abuser of children when they ought to be the most protected. As the Archdeacon says, your actions have damaged the Church's credibility and standing in the world. It relies for its work on trust and respect and these have been eroded as a result of your actions. In addition, as he says, the Church aspires to be a place where people, especially the most vulnerable, are safe and can find what they need. However, people will feel the exact opposite as a result of your actions.

12. It is common ground that, although the maximum powers of the Court are limited by the legislation which was in force at the relevant time, appropriate guidance can be obtained from guidelines which are available today. The relevant guidance was issued by the Sentencing Guidelines Council in 2007 and, although it relates to the 2003 Act, it is common ground that it provides helpful guidance in particular in relation to your offences of indecent assault in counts 3 and 9. Today that would be equivalent to the offence of sexual assault, which is governed by the guidance at pp.31-34. In a case of this kind, where there is contact between the naked genitalia of the offender and the naked genitalia, face or mouth of the victim, the starting point is given as 3 years imprisonment with a range of 2-5 years. That guideline assumes a person of good character after a trial.
13. As is accepted on your behalf, there are the following aggravating factors in your case: the number of complainants; the type of abuse, in particular the fact of ejaculation; your abuse of a position of trust; and the period of time over which your offending took place.

14. I bear in mind that you are a person of previous good character: you have reached the age of 75 years without any previous criminal convictions. You will also be given full credit for your early pleas of guilty. In that way your victims have been spared the need to relive their experiences by having to give evidence in Court.
15. I also bear in mind the testimonials which have been placed before the Court, which speak of the distinguished service you have given to the Church and the help you have given to other people during your life. As you yourself accept, you have ruined your life and brought disgrace on yourself. I also note the apology you have given through your counsel to your victims, their families and the Church, all of whom you accept you betrayed. Finally, I bear in mind the principle of totality.
16. The sentence of the Court is as follows. On counts 3 and 9, which relate to A, you will be sent to prison for three years concurrent. On counts 4, 5, 6 and 7, which also relate to A, the sentence is 1 year, also concurrent. On counts 10 and 11, which relate to B, the sentence is six months, concurrent on each but consecutive to the earlier sentences. On counts 12 and 13, which relate to C, the sentence is six months, again concurrent on each but consecutive to the earlier sentences.
17. That makes a total of four years imprisonment. You will serve one half of that sentence and will then be released on licence but you will remain liable to recall by the Secretary of State until the end of your sentence.
18. You will also be subject to a Sexual Offences Prevention Order in the terms which have been read to the Court and which are accepted on your behalf. You will be

the subject of disqualification by the Independent Safeguarding Authority. You will be subject to the notification requirements which apply to a person who is on the sex offenders' register for the period which is laid down by law.