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Priest abused Perlitz, claims defense team

by Dennis Coday

Douglas Perlitz, the Jesuit school alumnus who pleaded guilty Aug. 18 to sexually abusing boys at the home for street children he founded in Haiti, was himself the victim of sexual abuse by a Catholic priest, Perlitz's defense team says in a sentencing memorandum filed with the U.S. District Court in New Haven, Conn., Dec. 10.

Perlitz, 40, is to be sentenced Dec. 21. The 32-page sentencing memorandum filed with the judge recounts a "dark and abusive relationship" with an unnamed priest that began "within days" of Perlitz's arrival at Jesuit-run Fairfield University and "would continue for many years, including during all his work in Haiti."

Perlitz's project in Haiti, the Project Pierre Toussaint, was generously supported by Fairfield University students, faculty and alumni, as well as the wider Catholic community in Connecticut (*NCR*, Oct. 16, 2009).

The memorandum does not name the priest with whom Perlitz says he had a relationship, but many reports in Connecticut have linked him to Jesuit Fr. Paul Carrier, a campus minister at Fairfield who was a mentor to Perlitz during and after his school days. Carrier founded and led the Haiti Fund, which raised millions of dollars to support Perlitz's Haiti project.

Carrier was abruptly removed from Fairfield campus ministry in 2006 by his superiors in the New England Province of Jesuits, with his whereabouts not made public. When Perlitz was indicted in September 2009, Carrier was tied to the case and the New England Jesuits released a statement saying the province was cooperating with the U.S. attorney.

The statement also said that Carrier "currently has no assignment and is not performing any public ministry." Carrier has not been charged with any crimes.

Under stress from working with street children and the strain of high-level fundraising to keep the project operating, Perlitz began abusing alcohol, which "eventually led him to "cross the line," as he puts it, and engage in sexual misconduct," the memorandum said.

"In many ways, the abuse of power and trust that manifested itself in [Perlitz's] own painful relationship with the priest recurred in his own conduct with some of the young adults" of the Project Pierre Toussaint, the memorandum said.

"Doug does not seek to blame the priest for his criminal conduct, and takes full responsibility for his own actions. However, there is no doubt that this dark and abusive relationship played a significant role in his loss of control, and descent into criminal conduct," the memorandum said.

Perlitz faces up to 20 years in prison.

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