

Green thumb



Roger Horn, the plant growth facilities manager at the Norman E. Borlaug Center for Southern Crop Improvement, discusses plant research.

Church leader pleads guilty to rape charge

SALEM, Mass. (AP) — A former church youth leader and YMCA swim coach who used his jobs to befriend young boys pleaded guilty Monday in what prosecutors called the biggest child sex-abuse case in Massachusetts history.

Christopher Reardon, 29, had faced 130 counts involving 29 children. On Monday, he hung his head and responded "guilty" to 75 charges during a five-hour hearing that included graphic details of the allegations.

He could get up to life in prison at his Aug. 17 sentencing.

"The defendant essentially exploited his position of authority and trust," said prosecutor Robert Brennan.

About 50 family members and friends of the victims, as well as six boys, listened to the pleas. Several sobbed as the details were explained, and many embraced when the judge formally accepted the plea.

Defense attorney John Andrews Reardon decided to plead guilty — without any promise of a lenient sentence — because he wanted to spare the boys more time. Reardon had been expected to testify at trial that had been set for Monday out of the charges.

Reardon led religion classes for children at St. Agnes Roman Catholic Church in Middleton, 20 miles north of Boston, and also directed the Danvers YMCA Summer Day Camp. Prosecutors said he used his jobs to "systematically" befriend boys before his arrest last year.

According to court records, police confiscated at least two dozen pornographic videos, photographs of nude children, inflatable dolls and sex toys from Reardon's home and office at the church.

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