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DRAMA SURROUNDS SENTENCING: EX-CHURCH MUSIC DIRECTOR GETS 7 YEARS IN RAPE, FAINTS AMID SCREAMING

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Abstract

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Moments after the 32-year-old former music director of West Baltimore's Bethel AME Church was sentenced yesterday to seven years in prison for having sex with a 12-year-old parishioner, he collapsed in the courtroom, setting off a screaming match between two families that ended with the defendant's mother unresponsive and shaking on the hallway floor.



Timothy D. Price III of Owings Mills was revived moments later and heard Baltimore Circuit Judge Robert B. Kershaw's final post-sentencing remarks about his conviction for second-degree rape of the girl. His mother was still lying in the hallway, as paramedics worked to revive her, nearly 15 minutes later.

The drama that prompted sheriff's deputies to clear the courtroom followed an emotion-racked 75-minute hearing in which the girl's mother sobbed her way through a victim impact statement, telling Price that her daughter remained in "love" with Price and was obsessed with protecting him.

"She locks herself in her room, day in and day out, thinking about how to get you out of jail. That's all she talks about is you!"

The girl was not present during the hearing. The Sun does not publish the names of sex crime victims.

Price admitted in May to having sex with the girl, who was 12 at the time. Prosecutors said Price and the girl had sex on three occasions in his car between Dec. 1 and Jan. 15.

The encounters were all off the property of the African Methodist Episcopal Church - twice in a West Baltimore alley and once in a parking lot near Druid Hill Park, according to Assistant State's Attorney Katherine Moxley.

Dressed in blue jeans and a untucked black shirt, Price apologized yesterday to the victim's family in his first public remarks since being arrested in February.

"Every day, I've prayed for you," he told the girl's relatives and friends. "I'm not proud of what I have done. ... I'm committed to making wiser decisions and better choices."

The judge was not impressed.

"I'm troubled, quite frankly, by the statement by Mr. Price that he's not proud of what he did but hopes to make wiser decisions," the judge said before delivering his verdict. "That doesn't even come close to understanding" the nature of his crime.



Kershaw said the sentencing was the most difficult decision he has made in his 2 1/2 years on the bench. He called Price's sexual relationship with his pre-teen victim a "heinous act arising under circumstances that make it unthinkable."

Price was arrested after the girl's friend told the victim's mother in January about the sexual encounters, Moxley said. According to police, Price's encounters with the girl occurred after the music director obtained permission from her mother to take her to an outreach center and home from church Bible study and a dance class.

"To rape in the name of God is evil in the way few things can be," the victim's mother said.

Officially, Price was sentenced to 20 years in prison, with all but seven years suspended. He also received five years of probation, and Kershaw said he would recommend that Price serve his time at the Patuxent Institution in Howard County, a correctional facility geared toward treatment.

Price's second-degree rape conviction is considered an age-based crime, because the defendant is not accused of using force or threat of force. There was no DNA evidence supporting the state's case, but Price confessed to the crime verbally and in writing, Moxley has said. Other evidence included text messages between him and the girl, and a written journal in which she detailed her encounters with Price, according to police charging documents.

Kershaw said his sentence was meted out after considering a psychological evaluation of Price requested by the former music director's attorney, Charles L. Waechter. Waechter noted yesterday that the evaluation concluded that Price was not a pedophile.

Price has been held in the Baltimore City Detention Center in lieu of \$1 million bail since his arrest.

Price's wife and mother pleaded with Kershaw to be lenient. "He is a good person," said Rachel Price, the defendant's wife and the mother of his 2-year-old daughter. "He just made a bad decision. I'm asking for mercy today."



But the victim's relatives sought to impress upon the judge the devastation Price had brought into their lives. The girl's mother said the victim had recently expressed thoughts of suicide and had to be monitored constantly. "He used what God gave him to manipulate my 12-year-old daughter," she said.

Angela Branch, the victim's cousin, said she and her relatives have struggled to restrain their desire for retribution. "We forgive him," Branch told Kershaw. "Vengeance is the Lord's, but the word also says you reap what you sow."

The girl's mother said she and her family have been shunned by members of Bethel AME church, one of the city's largest and most influential congregations.

The 17,000-member church has a national reputation and boasts influential parishioners such as Mayor Sheila Dixon and Comptroller Joan M. Pratt. Sunday services are frequent stops for candidates for city and statewide office.

Bethel's pastor, the Rev. Frank M. Reid III, did not attend yesterday's hearing. After Price's arrest in February, Reid told The Sun that he had hired Price after a national search for a music director and that the young man's references were good. He was popular and admired at Bethel, Reid said: "The people loved him."

Before coming to Baltimore in 2006, Price spent three years as director of the fine arts ministry of Harvest Time Church in Houston. In 2005, he released a compact disc advertised as music for "contemporary worship and urban church."

A short biographical sketch about Price on a Web site that sells the CD describes him as a "sought out" and "influential" man who has been "chosen to change the face of evangelism."

During much of the hearing, Price sat with his head slightly bowed, his hands cuffed behind him. When he made his brief remarks toward the end of the hearing, Price spoke quietly and without visible emotion.



But after Kershaw read the sentence, Price slumped slightly in his chair. When asked to rise, he fell to the floor and lay on his back, his eyes fluttering slightly while a sheriff's deputy barked at the audience to "remain seated!"

But when the girl's mother and other relatives started shouting, the courtroom erupted into near pandemonium. The victim's mother and another woman had to be restrained and were apparently shouting at Price's family, seated nearby.

As the courtroom was cleared, Price's mother collapsed in the hall. Sheriff's deputies ordered everyone to leave the area while paramedics were called.

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Credit: Sun reporter

Illustration

Photo(s); Caption: **Timothy D. Price** III was convicted of having sex with a 12-year-old member of the church where he worked..

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