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Child abuser's ruling 'a joke'

A RETIRED Hunter Valley Anglican priest was jailed yesterday for sexually assaulting a teenage boy in Lismore's North Coast Children's Home.

Father Allan Kitchingham, 69, of Forfar St, Stockton, pleaded guilty in Newcastle District Court to five charges of assaulting the boy during 1975.

Judge Ralph Coolahan sentenced Father Kitchingham to two years and nine months in jail.

He will be eligible for parole in 15 months.

Judge Coolahan ordered that no details of the case be published that would identify the victim.

The victim, now a 41-year-old man who lives in Sydney, told *The Herald* outside court that the verdict was 'an absolute joke'.

'He abused me several times a week for a year when I was a 13-year-old without anyone to turn to, and I don't think that sentence reflects the damage he did or the

way the general community considers such a crime,' he said.

'When I was 14, I arrived back at the home after school one day to find that church officials had packed my gear up and then they put me on a bus to Kings Cross.

'I'm the one with the life sentence, I still have counselling twice a week and I've never been offered anything by the church.'

The victim said that while he believed the 'lenient' sentence should be appealed, he could not afford a legal challenge.

The court was told that Father Kitchingham was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1964 and took up his initial post as a curate in Singleton.

During 1975, when he was a chaplain at the North Coast Children's Home, he and his wife discovered that they were unable to have children.

Judge Coolahan said he accepted that Father Kitchingham

assaulted the boy during a 12-month period and had been of good character before and after 1975.

Newcastle Anglican Christ Church Dean Graeme Lawrence had spoken in support of Father Kitchingham in court.

References on Father Kitchingham's behalf were tendered from Bishops of Brisbane and Bathurst, which were not publicly available.

Judge Coolahan said he accepted that the assaults happened during an isolated period of opportunistic behaviour by Father Kitchingham and that he was not a person of general risk to the community.

Father Kitchingham had grossly abused a position of trust to exploit the victim for his own sexual gratification, he said.

The crime was at the higher end on a scale of severity and called for a period of imprisonment, the judge said.

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CORRECTION

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A court report in yesterday's *Herald* incorrectly named Fr Allan Kitchingman as Fr Kitchingham.