

Megachurch Volunteer Sentenced to 75 Years for Abusing Young Boys at Church

A former volunteer at a South Carolina megachurch was sentenced to 75 years in prison Thursday following his conviction for molesting boys as young as 3 years old in a bathroom during a children's program.

Jacop Robert Lee Hazlett, 29, was found guilty of six charges related to four of the 15 children police have identified as victims of sexual abuse at NewSpring Church in Charleston, court testimony revealed.

Prosecutors showed surveillance video during the trial of Hazlett leading four preschool-age boys to the church's bathroom and abusing them there. At one point, Hazlett used his cellphone to record the children and one child tried to push him away, news outlets reported of the court proceedings.

During sentencing, Hazlett told the judge an abusive upbringing and mental illness led him to molest the boys.

Authorities offered him a plea deal that would have required he admit to 15 of the counts and spend 50 years in prison in exchange for avoiding the potential maximum penalty of a life sentence, news outlets reported. But a judge instead sentenced him to the maximum time for multiple counts each of criminal sexual misconduct with a minor and sexual exploitation of a minor. {eoa}

The Associated Press.