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Mennonite senior jailed for molesting children

GUELPH, (CP) — An 82-year-old Mennonite farmer is facing a jail sentence of two years less a day for molesting 16 people, mostly children.

About 20 Mennonites from Arthur Township packed a Guelph courtroom Monday as Justice Norman Douglas passed sentence on Amsey Bearinger.

Bearinger pleaded guilty to 14 counts of indecent assault, two counts of sexual assault and one count of gross indecency.

The crimes, which occurred between January 1967 and August 1986, involved 13 males and three females, who, apart from two, were all children at the time.

Court heard that several of the males were hired hands who were fondled by Bearinger while assisting on his farm in Arthur Township.

The investigation began when a 35-year-old man came forward in January and told authorities that when he was eight, he helped drive a tractor on Bearinger's farm and while driving, the man reached into his shirt and fondled him.

Defence lawyer James Ruddock asked the judge to consider a conditional sentence of house arrest, given that the incidents happened decades ago and his client hasn't re-offended.

Despite the wishes of the Mennonite community, Douglas said he couldn't allow Bearinger to be placed under house arrest.

"I'm not dealing with Amsey Bearinger's sin," Douglas said, in response to several letters quoting Bible passages he'd received supporting Bearinger. "I'm not a judge of his soul. When a man abuses a child, he can affect that child for the rest of his life."

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