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## Drug theft victim says loss of trust will last her lifetime



The judge eyed pastor Rickey Alan Reed sternly.

Should Reed, after trying to break into a church member's home to steal prescription painkillers, spend up to four years in prison after violating such an important trust? Or should he be shown mercy as someone who was acting in the throes of a drug addiction but has since gotten help?

"This is a serious offense, Mr. Reed," Rutherford County Judge David Bragg told Reed, 55. "A person's home is their sanctuary, no less than where they pray."

In the end, Reed, former pastor of First Free Methodist Church, received mercy. The judge sentenced him to four years of probation. If he successfully completes that probation, which includes random drug checks, he will be able to have the charge dismissed and the felony wiped from his record.

But Jean Harris, the woman who went to police after catching Reed on video trying to break into her home last summer, said there is no wiping the crime from her memory. She said she has had to leave First Free Methodist Church after being a member there for 55 years, then

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Written by Brian Haas

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being shunned by church members for speaking to police.

“I’ll probably never be able to trust another pastor,” Harris testified in court. She turned to Reed. “I’ve lost a huge part of my life, and you caused the destruction of a home church that is now split.”

### Caught on video



Last July, Harris was trying to figure out who was stealing her prescription pain pills. She set up a video camera in her kitchen and waited.

On July 4, 2011, she caught Reed as he walked up to her door, knocked, jiggled the handle and tried to unlock it with a credit card. Stymied by the lock, he left.

Harris said she struggled with the decision of whether to tell police, but spoke out because of what she saw was an attempted coverup by church members. Police charged Reed with attempted aggravated burglary. They also have said that at least three other people suspect Reed stole prescription drugs, but two refused to press charges, and detectives didn’t have enough evidence in the third case.

On Friday, Reed admitted to trying to break into Harris’ home. When asked if he had burglarized anyone before he was caught on tape, he responded, “No, sir.”

But a few minutes later, he admitted that he previously burglarized Harris’ home to steal prescription pills.

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“I knew she had the drugs, she had given them to me before, and so ... ,” Reed testified, trailing off.

“That don’t tell me much,” responded J. Paul Newman, prosecutor on the case.

“I just went in the door one day,” Reed admitted. “I took some pills.”

### Trying to move on

Since the arrest, Reed has left First Free Methodist Church, taking with him a good number of church members. He is now the part-time interim pastor of Living Faith Ministries and working as a pizza delivery man.

He also has dealt with depression, suicidal thoughts and a difficult drug rehabilitation.

“I’ve seen him battle so much,” his wife, Jan Reed, said on the stand. “It’s like a miracle as far as how well he is doing.”

Reed said that he had never truly understood addiction until he was in the thick of it. And he said that his actions made him into another person — a change that he has since been able to reverse.

Harris watched skeptically as Reed spoke. She’s still stung by what she saw as a lack of truthfulness and contrition from Reed and the church. She listened carefully as Newman quizzed Reed as to whether he felt bad for what he had done.

“Jean is the victim. I’m very sorry what’s been done, the trouble I’ve caused her,” Reed responded. “I’m very sorry for that. That’s just not me. I didn’t understand addiction.”

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But Reed seemed unprepared when asked how he would help Harris heal from the fear she feels living in her own home, her newfound distrust of others and the loss of the church she called home for more than five decades.

“Well, uh, helping her heal? Just, I do want to, I want to apologize,” Reed responded. He collected himself. “Whatever it takes.”

Judge Bragg made sure that included \$500 Reed will have to pay Harris for the alarm and camera system she installed to make her less afraid in her own home.

After the sentencing, Reed’s attorney called the sentence just, particularly because of Reed’s good deeds as a pastor and the addiction he has had to battle.

“He made a mistake; it was driven by addiction,” said attorney Thomas Parkerson. “It doesn’t make him a monster; it doesn’t make him wicked.”

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