

# Man pleads guilty to molesting daughter

By NANCY VESSELL  
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Saying he wanted to be the one to say it happened, the Rev. Marcel Pickens, Jefferson City, pleaded guilty Monday to molesting his 11-year-old daughter, setting himself up for as much as seven years in prison.

"There's an act that has to be paid for," a teary-eyed Pickens, 36, told reporters after pleading guilty in Cole County Circuit Court.

Pickens told Cole County Circuit Judge Tom Brown that he had not been coerced into changing an earlier plea of "not guilty."

With his wife, two other pastors and other relatives at his side, Pickens told reporters he's now in counseling and hoped his family "can come back together to be a family again."

"I'm not a man who committed a criminal act; I'm a man who needed help," said Pickens, who serves as assistant pastor of a church in Higginsville.

He said ministers are often in

the role of helping others and neglect to get help for themselves.

Pickens will be sentenced later. The maximum penalty for first-degree child molestation is seven years in prison and a \$5,000 fine.

Assistant Prosecutor Bill Tackett said he will consider the young victim when deciding what penalty to seek.

"You have a situation where someone failed as a father and, in this case, as a minister," he said. "There's an 11-year-old victim that will pay for it the rest of her life."