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Idaho Man Gets 18 Years for ISIS Plot to Attack Churches

A true story of faith under pressure. Read the first half below, then continue online.

KEY SPIRITUAL TAKEAWAY

"Alexander Scott Mercurio, 21, of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, was sentenced on Tuesday, 10 November 2026, to 18 years in federal prison for attempting to provide material support to ISIS in a plot to attack churches"

(Transliterated from the original Hindi.)

They had gathered only to pray. When prayer itself becomes the target, faith is proved not by words but by staying.

The Story - Part One

Alexander Scott Mercurio, 21, of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, was sentenced on Tuesday, 10 November 2026, to 18 years in federal prison for attempting to provide material support to ISIS in a plot to attack churches. US District Judge David C. Nye also ordered lifetime supervised release. Mercurio had pledged allegiance to ISIS and planned a mass-casualty attack on churches in his hometown, and the FBI arrested him on 6 April 2024, one day before the attack was due to happen.

The plan, as set out by prosecutors, was chilling in its detail. Mercurio intended to incapacitate his own father with a metal pipe, steal his firearms, and then attack churches with guns, knives, explosives and an improvised flamethrower.

The attack was set for 7 April 2024, before the end of Ramadan. He was 19 years old at the time of his arrest.

Judge Nye rejected his lawyers' plea for a lighter term. The 18-year sentence, followed by a lifetime of supervised release, means Mercurio will spend his twenties and much of his thirties behind bars, and will remain under federal supervision for the rest of his life. He had pleaded guilty in October 2025.

Idaho Man Sentenced 18 Years ISIS Church Attack Plot

The sentencing hearing in federal court closed a case that began with an FBI investigation in the spring of 2024. Prosecutors said Mercurio had pledged his allegiance to ISIS and was preparing a mass-casualty attack on churches in Coeur d'Alene, a lakeside city in northern Idaho. The charge was attempting to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organisation, a federal offence that carries a maximum sentence of 20 years.

The Associated Press reported the sentence on 10 November, and the US Department of Justice published its own account of the case the same day. Both accounts agree on the core facts: the pledge to ISIS, the planned attack on churches, the arrest one day before it was due to happen, and the guilty plea last month.

What made the case stand out, even among terrorism prosecutions, was the target. Churches are not hardened buildings.

The Turning Point - What Happens Next

The story reaches a life-changing moment that changes everything -- and what seemed like the end is only the middle. Two reports disagree on the numbers, and one question is left unanswered: will the CCTV footage ever come out? Read the full story to find out what happens next.

PERSONAL REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When gathering to pray carries a real cost, what keeps a community coming together anyway -- and what would keep you coming?

2. The pastor's sister shielded him with her own body and fainted under the blows. What does costly, self-giving love look like in your own family or church?

3. When justice is delayed and a complaint is withdrawn under threat, how do believers hold on to truth without giving in to fear -- or to hatred?

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