News



Campus of Franciscan University of Steubenville in Steubenville, Ohio, is pictured Nov. 5, 2016. (Newscom/John Greim)



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A former campus minister at Franciscan University of Steubenville has been charged with rape and sexual battery against an individual with mental illness placed under his care for mental health treatment.

The charges against Third Order Franciscan Fr. David Morrier were filed on April 7 in Jefferson County, Ohio. Morrier, 59, is charged with one count of rape and two counts of sexual battery dating from November 2010 through the spring of 2013.

According to the indictment, the alleged victim's ability "to resist or consent was substantially impaired because of a mental or physical condition."

Morrier served as campus minister at Franciscan until 2014, which would include the time of the alleged sexual assault.

A statement from Franciscan University said "the University has cooperated and will continue to cooperate fully with authorities concerning the conduct of Father David Morrier, TOR, prior to 2014."

"Franciscan University removed him permanently from campus ministry, and he was also prohibited from returning to campus," the statement continued.

The Franciscan Friars of the Third Order Regular did not respond to NCR's request for comment.

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In June 2014, Morrier was named as parochial vicar of Saint Maria Goretti Catholic Church in Arlington, Texas, which is run by Third Order Franciscans. According to the professional networking site LinkedIn, he is currently employed as an "assistant to Local Minister at TOR Franciscans" in Loretto, Pennsylvania.

A statement from the Steubenville Diocese said they first became aware of the case in November 2018.

"Although Father Morrier is not a priest of the Steubenville Diocese, the diocese began an immediate preliminary investigation with the alleged victim and officers

with the Steubenville police department," read the statement.

"The Diocese of Steubenville submitted a report to the Minister General of the TOR's in Rome as well as to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at the Holy See on December 11, 2018. Since that time, the diocese has continued to work with the Steubenville police department and has provided updates on the investigation to the Holy See," it continued.

Franciscan University has previously come under fire for a questionable commitment to Title IX, the federal law mandating procedures for handling complaints of sexual discrimination, harassment or violence.

A 2018 NCR report of the controversy included the account of a student who, in 2007, was raped by a fellow and informed Morrier, then-coordinator of household life and campus ministry, of the assault. Following the incident, Morrier encouraged the student to seek therapy, but did not encourage her to report the rape to the police or file a report on campus.

"He told me my behavior was compromising and encouraged me to go to confession," the alleged victim told NCR, adding that Morrier then confronted the assailant without her permission, which she described as both a violation of her confidence but also put her in jeopardy.

According to paperwork sent to the Province of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus in Loretto, Pennsylvania, Morrier is summoned to appear in court in Steubenville, Ohio, on April 14.