News



by OSV News

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Brooklyn, N.Y. — March 20, 2023
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

U.S. District Court Judge Eric R. Komitee March 15 sentenced a former deacon who once ministered at a parish in the Diocese of Brooklyn to 16 years in prison for enticing three minors to engage in sexual conduct.

As part of his sentence, Rogelio Vega, 52, of Maspeth in the New York borough of Queens, will be required to register as a sex offender upon his release from prison, according to a statement on the sentencing issued by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of New York.

The statutory minimum sentence in Vega's case was 10 years of imprisonment, but he was also facing the possibility of receiving a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. His victims were between ages 14 and 16 at the time he had sex with them.

The New York Daily News quoted Komitee as saying, "Deterring the sexual exploitation of children is one of the most important, most essential tasks of the criminal justice system."

After Vega's sentencing, the Diocese of Brooklyn said in a statement: "We hope the healing process can begin for the victim-survivors in this case. We pray for them and all victim-survivors of sexual abuse. These heinous acts betrayed not only his victims but damaged the sacred trust of the faithful."

When Vega was first arrested Jan. 22, 2021, the diocese immediately suspended him from ministry, and the next year when he entered a guilty plea on federal charges he was ultimately facing, the diocese began the process of removing him from all ministry.

His arrest came during a New York undercover police sting operation. He was taken into custody for propositioning a "teen" -- but who in reality was a male police officer posing as the teen. In October 2021, he pleaded guilty to the charge in a Queens court in October 2021 in exchange for 10 years on probation and a spot on the sex offender registry. The same day he was charged federally because investigators found more victims on his cell phone, according to reports by the New York Daily News and other media.

On Sept. 16, 2022, he entered a guilty plea in federal court to the three counts for which he was ultimately sentenced. The diocese at that time began the process of removing him permanently from ministry, The Tablet, Brooklyn's diocesan newspaper, reported Sept. 19, 2022.

Advertisement

Shortly after his 2021 arrest, the Brooklyn diocese said in a statement, "We are horrified by the arrest and charges against Rogelio Vega. ... The Diocese of Brooklyn is committed to a zero-tolerance policy, as nothing is more important than the protection of children."

The diocese immediately removed Vega from ministry "in keeping with our diocesan policy and the 2002 U.S. bishops' 'Charter and Norms for the Protection of Children and Youth.'" This "prohibited him from ministering as a deacon and performing liturgical duties," the diocese said.

At the time, the deacon, who was ordained May 28, 2011, was in ministry at St. Sebastian Church in Woodside. He was assigned to the parish in December 2015. He previously served at Most Holy Trinity-St. Mary in Williamsburg.

The U.S. Attorney's Office March 15 release said that between approximately 2015 and January 2021, Vega, while serving as a deacon, used two internet messaging apps, Kik and Grindr, "to express his interest in 'young guys' and coerce and entice three male victims between the ages of 14 and 16 to meet him for sexual acts."

The Kik app is marketed to teens and the Grindr app is marketed to the LGBTQ+ community, the release said.

"Messages found on the defendant's cellphones revealed a series of communications in which the victims identified themselves as underage and the defendant arranged to meet them multiple times for sexual encounters in his car or at motels," it said.

According to local media reports, Vega was married with four children when he was apprehended by police in 2021.