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A brown man with graying black hair looks at the camera. A chiron at the bottom of the scree

A screen capture from CBS News Philadelphia shows Fr. Armand Garcia, who admitted Oct. 23, 2023, to sexually abusing a teen girl who was once an altar server at his parish, Immaculate Heart of Mary in Philadelphia. The priest, who has been on administrative leave since March 2018 and was arrested in March 2019, faced several charges, including for rape and photographing, filming and depicting on a computer sexual acts, but those charges were dropped and he entered a non-negotiated guilty plea for corruption of a minor and unlawful contact with a minor. (OSV News photo/CBS Philadelphia, YouTube)

Gina Christian

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A Philadelphia priest has admitted to sexually abusing a teen girl who was once an altar server at his parish.

Fr. Armand D. Garcia appeared in a Philadelphia courtroom Oct. 23 to plead guilty to corruption of a minor and unlawful contact with a minor. He will be sentenced in January 2024.

The abuse took place while Garcia was a parochial vicar at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Philadelphia from 2014-2017.

The priest had initially been charged with rape; photographing, filming and depicting on a computer sexual acts; sexual assault; and corruption of a minor. According to the criminal docket, the first three charges were dropped, while Garcia entered a non-negotiated guilty plea for corruption of a minor and unlawful contact with a minor.

The victim, who was a 13-year-old student at the parish school when she met the priest, delivered an impact statement at the hearing, noting the post-traumatic stress disorder and other effects she continues to suffer from the abuse.

She also said her family had severed its long ties with both the parish and the Catholic Church since "no one thought to intervene" when Garcia abused her.

In March 2018, the priest -- who by then had been appointed pastor of St. Martin of Tours Parish in Philadelphia -- was placed on administrative leave with his priestly faculties restricted after the Philadelphia Police Department notified the archdiocese of an abuse report. Garcia lived in a private residence "with no access to any parish or school," according to the archdiocese, until a yearlong criminal investigation led to his arrest in March 2019.

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The archdiocese said in a March 2019 statement that Garcia had possessed "clear criminal background checks as well as child abuse clearances and had successfully completed safe environment training courses" at the time he was placed on administrative leave. The archdiocese also said it had cooperated with law enforcement during the course of the investigation, and had notified affected parish communities.

Ordained in 2005, Garcia had served at several parishes, schools and offices in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia prior to his arrest. From 2010-2011, he took a personal leave of absence. Upon his return, he was assigned first as a parochial vicar to Our Lady of the Assumption Parish in Strafford, Pennsylvania, and then at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Philadelphia until 2017. He was pastor of St. Martin of Tours Parish from 2017 until his removal from ministry in 2018.

Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner said in an Oct. 23 statement that he was grateful for the victim's perseverance "despite many procedural and pandemic-related delays since she first contacted authorities in 2017."

He added that "Armand Garcia will never again be allowed to abuse his position of trust as clergy and will never again be allowed to use the church to access vulnerable victims."

In an email to OSV News, Archdiocese of Philadelphia Chief Communications Officer Ken Gavin said that "there has not been any change to [Garcia's] clerical status over the past several years" since the priest's faculties were restricted and he was placed on administrative leave in March 2018.

"As in the case of all criminal investigations, the archdiocese cooperated with law enforcement in the course of its work," said Gavin, adding that the archdiocese "does not commence required canonical investigations until after law enforcement completes its process."