News

A black and white photo of an older priest wearing glasses and smiling broadly

Fr. Ignazio Medina, a retired priest in the Diocese of Jefferson City, Mo., has been found guilty in a church trial of soliciting sex from an adult sexual during sacrament of reconciliation. He is pictured in an undated photo. (OSV News photo/Diocese of Jefferson City)

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A now-retired Missouri priest has been barred from hearing confessions, months after diocesan tribunal judges found he had abused his ecclesiastical office through financial misconduct.

The Diocese of Jefferson City, Missouri, announced Jan. 1 that Fr. Ignazio Medina had been declared guilty of sexually soliciting an adult during the sacrament of reconciliation.

The decision came after an administrative disciplinary process overseen by the Vatican's Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, the diocese said.

Effective immediately, Medina is "permanently deprived of the right to hold any ecclesiastical office (parish or diocesan) and of the faculty to hear confessions," said the diocese in its statement.

In addition, Medina -- who will remain a diocesan priest and receive retirement benefits -- "may not celebrate or concelebrate Mass except with his diocesan bishop's explicit permission, which will not be granted except for extraordinary circumstances," the statement continued.

The diocese added that throughout the investigative process, "the victim has been offered assistance for healing."

"I thank the victim in this case for stepping forward, and I pray for healing," Bishop W. Shawn McKnight said in the diocese's statement.

The bishop disclosed he had met with Medina "to express my concerns," adding he had informed the priest he "will not be allowed to celebrate or concelebrate Mass publicly except for funeral Masses of his immediate family, at the gathering of priests at their annual conference in October, and at the Chrism Mass during Holy Week."

The diocese said it had received a report about the solicitation on April 15, 2022, through the diocesan safe environment abuse hotline. At the time, Medina was pastor of Our Lady of the Lake Parish in Lake Ozark, Missouri.

McKnight "immediately placed temporary restrictions on Father Medina," said the diocese in its statement, barring the priest from hearing confessions and from "being alone with anyone other than his family on church property."

Canon law explicitly forbids a priest "in confession … on the occasion or under the pretext of confession" to "[solicit] a penitent to commit a sin against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue," which forbids adultery.

The diocese said that due to the crime's serious nature, "jurisdiction is reserved to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome," to which it delivered the results of its investigation on June 2, 2022.

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Medina, ordained in 1978, "was granted retirement in July of 2022," Jacob Luecke, the diocese's director of communications, told OSV News in an email.

On Oct. 25, 2022, the Vatican "instructed Bishop McKnight to establish an administrative disciplinary process to determine guilt, and if Father Medina were to be found guilty, to impose appropriate penalties."

The bishop in turn "delegated the matter to an experienced priest and canon lawyer from the Archdiocese of Toronto in Canada" so as "to ensure an impartial process," during which Medina was represented by a canon lawyer, said the diocese.

The dicastery approved the decree of guilt Nov. 27, 2023, and permitted the diocese to impose permanent penalties. Medina chose not to appeal, said the diocese.

Luecke said in an email to OSV News that "the penalty received by Father Medina was the maximum punishment available for the crime he was found guilty of committing.

"Dismissing Father Medina from the priesthood was not a possible outcome of the crime of which he was accused, according to the law of our Church as indicated by the DDF," said Luecke. "The Catholic Church's definition of 'sin against the sixth commandment' is a broad category of potential crimes -- some more serious than others. In every case, the details of these crimes are kept strictly confidential to protect the victims and safeguard the seal of the confessional."

In April 2023, Medina was found guilty by a diocesan tribunal of "abuse of ecclesiastical power" due to financial misconduct at a previous pastoral assignment.

While pastor of St. Stanislaus Parish in Wardsville, Missouri, Medina had transferred some $300,000 in parish funds into personal accounts -- $100,000 of which had been given to an out-of-state sibling. In addition, the tribunal judges also found approximately $20,000 in cash had been inexplicably withdrawn from parish accounts while Medina was pastor.

The issue first surfaced in December 2018, according to an April 25, 2023, statement by the diocese.

In their ruling, the tribunal judges in that case acknowledged the priest had made full restitution of the funds, and issued a further penalty of $26,000 to cover

diocesan audit and legal expenses from the trial.

As part of its inquiry, the diocese notified the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The agency's St. Louis field office told OSV News that it does not comment on the status of current or concluded investigations.

Luecke told OSV News in an email that he did not have "any information about the results of the FBI investigation" into Medina.