Vatican
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Many men sit at the front of a room below a crucifix with observers seated in chairs facing the

This Oct. 14, 2020, file photo shows the Vatican City State criminal court during the opening of the trial of Fr. Gabriele Martinelli, who was accused of sexually abusing a younger student at the Vatican's St. Pius X Pre-Seminary. Acquitted in 2021, the priest was found guilty by a Vatican appeals court Jan. 23, 2024, of "corrupting a minor" and sentenced to two and a half year in prison. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

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Vatican City — January 24, 2024
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Fr. Gabriele Martinelli, acquitted by the Vatican City criminal court in 2021 of sexually abusing a fellow seminarian, was found guilty on appeal of "corrupting a minor" and sentenced to two years and six months in prison.

Under Vatican law, like Italian law, both the prosecution and the defense can appeal verdicts. And a second appeal is still possible, so Martinelli was not taken into custody.

Vatican News reported Jan. 23 that the appeals court, led by Archbishop Alejandro Arellano Cedillo, upheld the earlier court verdict that Martinelli could not be

punished for acts that occurred prior to 2008 when he turned 16 and that there was not sufficient evidence to convict him of the charges of "aggravated rape and aggravated lewd acts" even after he turned 18.

Martinelli, now 31, was accused of sexually abusing another seminarian at the St. Pius X Pre-Seminary from 2007 to 2012. The seminary, owned by the Diocese of Como, Italy, and operated by the Opera Don Folci religious institute, was located inside the Vatican walls until Pope Francis ordered it to move out while the initial trial was still underway.

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Roberto Zannotti, the Vatican prosecutor in the case, filed the appeal.

During the initial trial, a former student of the minor seminary -- identified as L.G. -- said he was sexually abused over a six-year period despite having told the rector that an older student was "bothering" him.

After handing down the initial verdict in October 2021, the Vatican City court issued a statement to the press saying the trial had established "that sexual relations of various kinds and intensities" occurred between the defendant and the accuser "and that they actually lasted for the whole of the above-mentioned five-year period" when the young men were at the minor seminary. However, the court said, "there is no proof that the victim was forced into such relations by the defendant with the contested violence or threats."

The Diocese of Como did not respond to a question Jan. 24 about Martinelli's status or any restrictions placed on his ministry.