

Federal Jury Convicts Ohio Priest of Sex Trafficking of Minors

An Ohio priest has been convicted of five charges of sex trafficking, including that of a minor, by a federal jury and faces a minimum of 15 years behind bars and a maximum of life in prison

Michael Zacharias, 56, of Findlay was arrested in 2020 and charged with sex trafficking, including of a minor and of an adult by force, fraud, coercion or enticement. Formerly a priest at St. Michael the Archangel Parish in Findlay, Zacharias was ordained in 2002 and was convicted of trafficking three victims when they were minors or adults, Fox News Digital reported.

According to a criminal complaint, investigators were aware that Zacharias' sexual conduct with minors dated back to the late 1990s. The federal jury was presented evidence in court showing how he met the victims when they were young. At the time, Zacharias attended seminary school at St. Catherine's Catholic Parish in Toledo.

The Department of Justice said Zacharias "started grooming" his victims for commercial sex acts when they were young and used his position as a priest and a teacher to integrate himself into the boys' lives as a person of trust.

One of the victims testified that he was afraid Zacharias would sexually abuse his brother—one of the victims and a minor—if he did not comply with the defendant's demands to provide sexual services for money.

"This defendant betrayed the victims in the most inhumane way," Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice

Department's Civil Rights Division said in a statement. "He robbed them of their childhood, their dignity and their faith.

"He inflicted cruel psychological harm, preying on their fears and forcing them to choose between submitting to commercial sex acts, or incurring the pain of losing a father figure or counselor, suffering withdrawal sickness and risking sexual abuse of a loved one." {eo}

Shawn A. Akers *is the online editor at Charisma News.*