

Public Safety

# Police: Two new victims allege Catholic priest in D.C. abused them

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The D.C. Catholic priest charged last month with sexually assaulting a teenage girl was again arrested Tuesday and accused of abusing two additional victims, including a girl who was 9 years old at the time, authorities said.

Urbano Vazquez, 46, assistant pastor of the Shrine of the Sacred Heart in Northwest Washington, turned himself in to authorities Tuesday on charges of second-degree sexual assault of a minor and misdemeanor assault of an adult woman. The alleged abuse of the juvenile began when she was 9 years old and continued until she was 10, according to William Miller, a spokesman for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia.

According to a D.C. police report, the girl reported the priest kissed her on the lips and several times inappropriately touched her over her clothing.

The report says the woman complained Vazquez twice touched her breasts against her will during confession.

The alleged misconduct occurred between June 2016 and December 2017 at the church, according to charging documents.

“Although we are in a very toxic environment for one who is confronting allegations of sexual misconduct, Father Urbano hopes to respond to these allegations in a responsible manner as we investigate and seek to understand the bases of these allegations,” Vazquez's attorney Robert Bonsib said in a statement. “Father Urbano appreciates all those who have reached out to support him during this difficult time.”

Last month, Vazquez was arrested on a single count of second-degree child sexual abuse. At the time, authorities said three young female parishioners reported they had been abused by Vazquez in 2015, when they were teenagers.

Vazquez was charged in connection with one victim, accused of putting his hand down the shirt of the then-13-year-old girl as she sat in his office during a church picnic. Court papers say that when confronted around that time, Vazquez denied allegations he had inappropriately touched the girl.

Prosecutors said they were not able to charge Vazquez in the other alleged instances of inappropriate behavior because the three-year statute of limitations had expired on misdemeanor offenses.

The new allegations involve different victims, Miller said.

The scandal has shaken parishioners at the Shrine of the Sacred Heart, one of the largest predominantly Latino parishes in the Washington region. Following Vazquez's initial arrest, the main priest at the Shrine of the Sacred Heart, the Rev. Moises Villalta, was removed and the coordinator for child protection, Sonia Marlene Aquino, was placed on leave for failing to "follow appropriate protocols related to reporting claims," the Archdiocese of Washington said in a letter to its priests at the time.

In a Tuesday letter to parishioners, the archdiocese said Vazquez had cleared a background check and reiterated its decision to take action regarding Villalta and Aquino. It said the archdiocese was "fully cooperating" in the investigation and encouraged anyone with information to contact D.C. police.

One parishioner, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity surrounding the case in the community, said Tuesday that Sacred Heart over the weekend held its first community forum about the case and had planned another for Tuesday night. Forty or 50 people came Saturday, the person said.

During a court hearing after his arrest in November, prosecutors agreed to allow Vazquez to avoid D.C. jail during the investigation. He was permitted to return to his residence in Pennsylvania.

Vazquez returned to Washington on Monday for a brief hearing in D.C. Superior Court, where he waived his preliminary hearing and prosecutors said the case was being presented to a grand jury. Supporters who came to court hugged the priest after the hearing.


On Tuesday, Vazquez was informed of the new arrest warrant and was allowed to turn himself in to authorities, according to an official familiar with the investigation.

Vazquez is expected back in court on Wednesday, when prosecutors this time could argue that he be remanded to D.C. jail as a result of the new charges.

The U.S. attorney's office in the District has set up a "clergy abuse" hotline, where victims can call 202-252-7008 or email [USADC.ReportClergyAbuse@usdoj.gov](mailto:USADC.ReportClergyAbuse@usdoj.gov).


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