

Filipino priest arrested for abusing church volunteer

Archdiocesan authorities have stripped Father Karole Reward Israel of priestly functions pending investigations

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The recent arrest of a Filipino priest for alleged sexual molestation and blackmail of a 16-year-old church volunteer has come as a surprise for the [Archdiocese of Tuguegarao](#) in the northern Philippines.

Father Karole Reward Israel, 29, a newly ordained cleric who received his assignment sometime in May 2021, has been stripped of his priestly functions pending investigations and a trial.

“The archdiocese will fully cooperate with the prosecution service towards the conduct of an unbiased preliminary investigation and will also extend its assistance to our priest,” the archdiocese said in a statement.

Israel’s arrest by the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) on Oct. 20 was made public two days later. Authorities said the clergyman had molested the victim several times.

“We formed a team of NBI officers who followed the priest and his minor victim to a meeting place. He was demanding sexual favors from her by threatening to leak their sex videos,” NBI Director Arcelito Albao told the press on Oct. 22.

The victim who hails from a town in the Cagayan province alleged that Father Israel seduced her and forcibly took pictures of her naked.

The clergyman did not resist arrest although he denied any sexual misconduct or having threatened the victim,

according to police reports.

State lawyers said Father Israel faces multiple criminal charges such as child abuse, sexual harassment, violence and violation of the Anti-Photo and Voyeurism Law for recording a sex video and forcibly taking nude photographs.

“He is excused from the performance of his priestly obligation, except the obligation of prayer,” the archdiocese statement said. “Meanwhile, we earnestly ask for prayers for all priests who bear all the frailties that afflict us all.”

A group of Catholic lawyers said rape and sexual molestation cases are “special cases” because the testimony of the victim itself is evidence against the accused.

“In rape cases, the Supreme Court of the Philippines was clear in ruling that no woman in her right mind would claim that she was raped or sexually molested, especially if the victim is a minor. Thus, her testimony is the evidence against the accused,” Chris Lao, a law professor, told UCA

News.

A day after his arrest, Israel posted bail for his temporary liberty pending trial in the court.