

Minister admits molestations of 23 children

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 The Associated Press

GREENWOOD, S.C. - A minister and former elementary school aide who videotaped himself molesting children pleaded guilty Monday to sexually abusing nearly two dozen youngsters and was sentenced to 60 years in prison.

The Rev. Fernando Garcia, 42, pleaded guilty to 47 counts. He admitted molesting 23 victims ages 5 to 13 at his church office and at the school.

After his plea, the Baptist minister stared at the courtroom floor while the mother of two of the victims, boys 10 and 12 at the time, called Garcia "this evil incarnate" and said her family would never be the same.

Garcia, who grew up in Mexico, said that as a boy he was abused by a Roman Catholic priest.

"Your kids need special counseling. I don't know what I can do to help," he said.

"What you are seeing here is the result of somebody who never took the chance to be counseled."

Garcia was recommended strongly from his previous ministry in Carson City, Nev., when came here in 1998 to work with the Abbeville Baptist Association.

The umbrella group for local churches was looking for a minister to serve the growing Hispanic population in this textile town of 20,000 people.

He held Sunday night services in Spanish at a local church and performed counseling.

"He could speak English and Spanish. He was gifted in music and preaching," Wallace Hughes, the Baptist association's director of missions, said last summer.

Police said that in Garcia's office at the Baptist association, they found 26 videotapes of him sexually abusing children.

The tapes came to light after an 8-year-old boy told his mother in May that he had been molested by Garcia.

Police also found a list of 145 names indicating Garcia may have molested more children and young men, some of them in two other states.

Garcia's wife, Leticia, sobbed as she spoke in Spanish on her husband's behalf.

"This is a different Fernando than what I used to know," she said through an interpreter.

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