http://www.dnronline.com/news/crime/missionary-gets-years-for-molestation/article_f0257af4-8ef2-11e8-b854-8791503d2770.html

HOT

Missionary Gets 23 Years For Molestation

Guilty Of Abusing Kids While Working In Haiti

By PETE DeLEA Daily News-Record 15 hrs ago

HARRISONBURG — A 40-year-old Stuarts Draft man who molested roughly two dozen children while doing missionary work in Haiti will spend more than two decades in a federal prison.

On Feb. 6, James Arbaugh pleaded guilty to traveling in foreign commerce from the United States and engaging in illicit sexual conduct with a person under the age of 18.

During a hearing Monday in U.S. District Court in Harrisonburg, Judge Elizabeth Dillon sentenced Arbaugh to 23 years in prison. He faced up to 30 years.

After prison, he will be on supervised release for life.

“This was a heinous crime,” Dillon said as she announced her sentence. “It was a crime that involved scheming and planning. Mr. Arbaugh groomed his victims.”

Federal authorities launched an investigation on Sept. 11 after a counselor at the Family Life Resource Center in Harrisonburg notified Rockingham County Social Services that Arbaugh disclosed sexual abuse against children. The agency called the Harrisonburg Police Department, which contacted federal agents.

Arbaugh told police he produced movies to teach people in Haiti about Jesus. He said he traveled to the Caribbean island nation between 2009 and 2017 as part of his family’s well-drilling business.

His family often traveled there to volunteer their time and money to dig wells in rural areas.

During the investigation, Arbaugh admitted he molested children while in Haiti.

Prosecutors say a witness corroborated Arbaugh’s confession.

A special agent with U.S. Homeland Security arrested Arbaugh on Nov. 15.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Jeb Terrien asked Dillon to give Arbaugh a maximum sentence. Terrien said four factors can be attributed to his request: the number of victims, their extreme vulnerability, the duration of the abuse and that Arbaugh was in a power of trust.

Terrien also told Dillon that Arbaugh told authorities that the children “appreciated” the sexual abuse and they were “acceptable in Haitian culture.”

But Arbaugh’s public defender, Erin Trodden, argued for a more lenient sentence, although she didn’t specify an exact prison term.

Trodden asked for a lighter sentence because Arbaugh disclosed the abuse and provided incriminating information, including the names and contact numbers of the victims’ parents in Haiti.

“He came to the United States to get help voluntarily,” she said.

Trodden also told Dillon that Arbaugh worked hard to improve the lives of many Haitians living in poverty.

“While he has done a great deal of harm there, he has done a good deal of good,” Trodden said.

Before he was sentenced, Arbaugh addressed the courtroom.

“I’m sorry. I know I have hurt many people,” he said. “I never meant to cause such hurt to the people and place I love.”

Contact Pete DeLea at 574-6267 or pdelea@dnronline.com