

Child porn suspect arraigned in federal court

The Rev. Gregory Lisby suspended for 'inappropriate relationship'



GREGORY LISBY

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The bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts yesterday sent a letter to all congregants lamenting the arrest of the Rev. Gregory Lisby on a child pornography charge last night, highlighting that Lisby has been banned from all

contact with the church.

FBI agents raided Lisby's Worcester home — an

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Episcopal rectory where he lives with his husband and the couple's two daughters — on Wednesday. Lisby was a newly minted kindergarten teacher in Holyoke when the government closed in. He resigned his position at the school in an email sent to a Holyoke schools official at 2:30 Thursday morning.

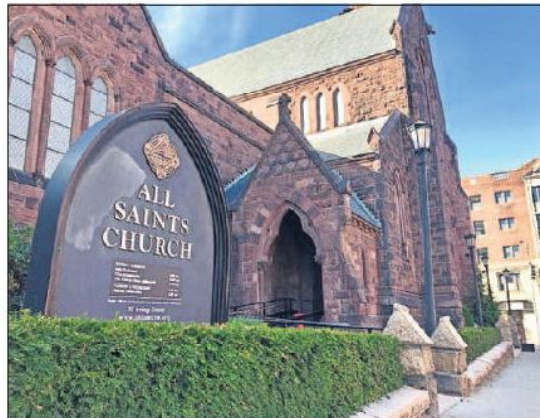
Lisby was arrested Thursday night in Northborough, according to a news release from the U.S. attorney's office in Boston. He was arraigned in a federal court in Boston yesterday afternoon. Lisby has been charged with possession of child pornography after agents recovered more than 180 photos and 15 videos from his computer, according to court records. That charge carries a maximum prison sentence of 20 years.

Lisby will remain in custody until his next court date Sept. 23.

Lisby, who was brought into the courtroom yesterday in handcuffs, sat quietly and stared ahead as federal prosecutors recommended keeping him detained because he is a flight risk and poses a danger to the community. The judge agreed Lisby will remain in custody.

A letter from Bishop Douglas J. Fisher says he suspended Lisby from his position as rector of All Saints Church in Worcester in 2018 for "an inappropriate relationship with an adult that did not involve sexual contact."

"Nothing I discovered during the disciplinary process gave me any reason to believe he was a danger to children," Fisher wrote.



All Saints Church in Worcester where Gregory Lisby previously served as rector. (NOAH BOMBARD / MASSLIVE.COM)

Fisher's letter says Lisby is married to the Rev. Timothy Burger, rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Worcester; the couple lives in the rectory next door. Fisher said that although Lisby is in federal custody, he has been banned from contact with the Episcopal church and will be subject to a disciplinary investigation.

"I have no reason to believe that children in our diocese have been victimized in this situation. Yet, I know that children whose images appear in pornography are heinously abused and violated by the adults who produce and consume it. This reality breaks my heart," Fisher wrote.

"Please also pray for Tim and their two daughters, and for Greg," the letter adds. "When trust has been violated, God's people and God's mission suffer."

In addition to the graphic images FBI agents allegedly recovered from Lisby's computer, they also found a cover letter dated in 2018

while Lisby was applying for teaching jobs.

"If I could teach any grade, I would love to be a kindergarten teacher," the letter read, in part. "The joy, spontaneity, and openness to learning of younger children is what attracts me to early childhood education."

The arrest late Thursday came just hours after Lisby submitted his resignation to the Holyoke School Department.

Holyoke Public Schools Receiver Stephen Zrike Jr. said Lisby began teaching at the Morgan School in August and worked as a teaching assistant in the Jericho summer program for disabled students.

Lisby was a substitute teacher in Worcester in 2018 and an instructional aide in Shrewsbury Public Schools in 2018 and 2019. He also worked as teacher assistant at Little Sprouts preschool in Natick in 2019. Earlier he worked as a social worker in other states and was a minister in Episcopal churches in

New Jersey and Rhode Island. Zrike notified parents via email about the investigation this week.

According to U.S. Attorney for Massachusetts Andrew E. Lelling, Lisby, 40, is charged with a single count of possession of child pornography.

He fell under federal scrutiny when investigators received a tip about child pornography being uploaded to a Microsoft OneDrive account that was determined to be registered to Lisby. The account would allow the user to store information online and be able to access it remotely from anywhere.

Federal officials executed a search warrant on his residence in Worcester, the rectory of St. Luke's Episcopal Church. According to an affidavit filed with the courts by FBI special agent Adam Strode, the search revealed a tablet and a cellphone belonging to Lisby that each had applications installed that would allow access to OneDrive.

The investigation is part of Project Safe Childhood, a Department of Justice program that uses state, local and federal resources to locate, arrest and prosecute those involved in the production and distribution of child pornography, and to identify and rescue the children being exploited.

Members of the public who have questions, concerns or information regarding this case are advised to call the U.S. attorney's office at 617-748-3274.

For more information about Project Safe Childhood, visit projectsafechildhood.gov.

Patrick Johnson and Jeanette DeForge of The Republican and Steph Solis of MassLive.com contributed to this report