



U.S. Department of Justice

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PRESS RELEASE

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FORMER YOUTH MINISTER PLEADS GUILTY
TO FEDERAL CHILD PORNOGRAPHY OFFENSE

In June 2010, **Matthew Nichols**, a 58 year old resident of Los Alamos, NM who was then employed as a youth minister at Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church in Los Alamos, was indicted on federal distribution, receipt and possession of child pornography charges. Earlier today, Nichols entered a guilty plea to distribution and attempted distribution of child pornography before United States Magistrate Judge W. Daniel Schneider under a plea agreement with the United States Attorney's Office. Nichols specifically admitted to distributing and attempting to distribute a video depicting a minor boy engaged in sexually explicit conduct with an adult male as charged in Count 2 of the indictment.

United States Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales said that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) of the United States Department of Homeland Security, the New Mexico Attorney General's Office (NMAGO), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Computer Analysis Response Team (CART) initiated the investigation that led to

Nichols' arrest after the NMAGO received a cyber-tip in September 2009 from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children indicating that a certain IP Address was being used to distribute child pornography. Investigation revealed that the IP Address was subscribed to the Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church in Los Alamos, where Nichols was then employed. Further investigation revealed that an IP Address subscribed to Nichols at his residential address also was being used to distribute child pornography.

On December 29, 2009, agents and investigators with the NMAGO, ICE, FBI and CART executed search warrants at the Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church and Nichols' residence and recovered computers and computer-related media containing visual depictions of minors engaged in sexually explicit conduct. According to the plea agreement, forensic examinations of the computers and computer-related media uncovered 1465 images and 186 videos of child pornography.

Nichols, who previously had been convicted of corruption of minors and criminal solicitation (to commit involuntary deviant sexual intercourse) in Pennsylvania, has been in custody since his arrest on June 23, 2010. At sentencing, Nichols faces a term of not less than fifteen (15) years and not more than forty (40) years imprisonment, a maximum fine of \$250,000 and a lifetime term of supervised release. Nichols also will be required to register as a sex offender upon his release from prison.

The case was investigated by the NMAGO, ICE, FBI and CART and is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Charlyn Rees. It was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative launched in May 2006 by the Department of Justice to combat the growing epidemic of child sexual exploitation and abuse. Led by U.S. Attorneys' Offices and the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state and local resources to better locate, apprehend and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the Internet, as well as to identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit www.projectsafchildhood.gov.

The case also was brought as part of the New Mexico Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force's (ICAC Task Force) mission to locate, track, and capture Internet child sexual predators and Internet child pornographers in New Mexico. There are 61 federal, state and local law enforcement agencies associated with the ICAC Task Force, which is funded by a grant administered by the NMAGO. Anyone with information relating to suspected child predators and suspected child abuse is encouraged to contact federal or local law enforcement.

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