



U.S. Department of Justice

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FORMER PASTOR SENTENCED TO 17 YEARS IN FEDERAL PRISON ON CHILD PORNOGRAPHY CONVICTIONS

Defendant was Pastor at First United Methodist Church in Royse City, Texas

DALLAS — Steve Richardson, 36, the former Pastor of the First United Methodist Church in Royse City, Texas, was sentenced late yesterday by U.S. District Judge Sam A. Lindsay to 17 years in federal prison, following his guilty plea in March to two child pornography offenses, announced Acting U.S. Attorney James T. Jacks of the Northern District of Texas. In addition, Judge Lindsay ordered that Richardson serve a lifetime of supervised release and register as a sex offender. Richardson has been in federal custody since he was arrested on September 24, 2008, by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents on related charges in a federal criminal complaint.

“ICE agents target and investigate anyone who produces, possesses or shares child pornography,” said John Chakwin, special agent in charge of the ICE Office of Investigations in Dallas. “However, ICE prioritizes its investigations against anyone who may have direct contact with children, as was the case with this former pastor.” Chakwin oversees 128 counties in north Texas, and the State of Oklahoma.

Richardson pleaded guilty to one count of transporting and shipping child pornography and one count of possession of child pornography. In documents filed in court, Richardson admitted that on December 20, 2007, he logged into his Google “Hello” account and sent an image of a minor engaged in sexually explicit conduct. Google Hello software was an Internet service that enables users to trade images quickly, connecting directly (peer-to-peer) to each other’s computers specifically to share pictures. Since the connection was peer-to-peer, there was no limit to the number and size of pictures that could be shared. Once a connection was created, the individuals simply selected the pictures they wished to share — an individual picture, or a folder containing thousands of photos. While connected, the individuals could also engage in chat conversations, thus overcoming the traditional limitation of peer-to-peer software by facilitating both live chat and exchange of large volumes of files simultaneously.

Richardson, using his Google Hello identity “cowboysspades,” communicated over the Internet with an undercover ICE agent in Seattle, Washington. During that communication, Richardson sent an image of child pornography and requested images of child pornography from the undercover agent. When the agent provided an excuse for being unable to send images, Richardson terminated the chat.

On September 24, 2008, ICE agents executed a search warrant at First United Methodist Church in Royse City and seized a desktop computer from Richardson’s office that contained images of child pornography. Richardson admitted possessing an external hard drive that contained images of child pornography.

Richardson admitted that he traded child pornography with other Google Hello users and that he possessed more than 600 images of child pornography, including sadistic, masochistic, or other violent images involving minors.

This case was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative to combat the growing epidemic of child sexual exploitation and abuse launched in May 2006 by the Department of Justice. Led by United States Attorneys' Offices and the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section (CEOS), 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.projectsafechildhood.gov

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Lisa Miller and Aisha Saleem prosecuted the case.

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