He groomed Haitian boys for sex, feds say; Now Stuarts Draft missionary is in custody

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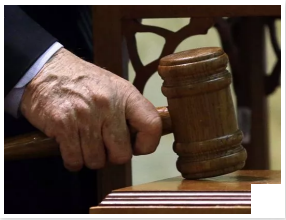

(Photo: Patrick Semansky, AP)

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HARRISONBURG - A former Stuarts Draft man who did missionary work in Haiti for years is accused of molesting nearly two dozen young boys in that country and trying to groom others for future sex acts, according to federal court records.

James D. Arbaugh is in federal custody, court records indicate.

According to the online news site "The Mennonite," Arbaugh attended Mountain View Mennonite Church in Lyndhurst and was a board member for an organization called Walking Together for Christ Haiti.

On Sept. 11, Arbaugh allegedly told a counselor at the Family Life Resource Center in Harrisonburg that he'd fondled numerous boys in Haiti, where he'd been a missionary for about 10 to 15 years, according to court documents.

The counselor contacted Child Protective Services, and Arbaugh was interviewed four days later and a second time in October.

During his interviews, Arbaugh told authorities he was an information technology expert, and said he produces movies and uses them to teach about Jesus Christ in Haiti.

Between 2009 and 2017, Arbaugh reportedly admitted to grooming or having sexual relations with 21 boys under the age of 18, court documents show.

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“Arbaugh indicated he used his missionary work in Haiti to build friendships with the minors,” a federal affidavit stated. “Arbaugh acknowledged that he groomed the minors in Haiti by engaging in minor sexual activities with them so that one day they would be open to more.”

Arbaugh is said to have traveled to certain villages multiple times per year, where he would show his movies and initiate friendships with young boys. When he first met the boys, they'd play in an effort to get to know one another, federal authorities said.

During subsequent visits, he'd let the boys “sleep in his truck where he snuggled with them,” the affidavit said. When he returned, the contact allegedly increased to fondling and oral sex, federal authorities said.

Arbaugh would also swim with naked minors in rivers, where he reportedly rubbed against the boys and engaged in “genital to genital” touching underwater, the affidavit said.

Federal authorities also said Arbaugh would let a young boy visit him at his home in Haiti to watch movies. During those visits, Arbaugh “would put his hand on the minor's thigh to see where it might lead,” according to the affidavit.

One of the alleged victims was the 5-year-old son of a Haitian pastor, federal authorities said.

Arbaugh relinquished his passport, and it was subsequently seized prior to his incarceration.

According to federal authorities, Arbaugh is charged with engaging in illicit sexual conduct in a foreign place.

The probe of Arbaugh is being handled by Homeland Security Investigations. The Harrisonburg Police Department is assisting, as is the United States Department of State.