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**U.S. Attorney Announces Indictment of Catholic Priest
And
Deferred Prosecution Agreement
With the Catholic Diocese of Jackson**

Oxford, MS – U.S. Attorney William C. Lamar of the Northern District of Mississippi announced today that a Mississippi Catholic Priest has been indicted on multiple counts of wire fraud and that the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Northern District of Mississippi has entered into a deferred prosecution agreement with the Catholic Diocese of Jackson, a Mississippi non-profit corporation.

The case stems from an investigation initiated by Homeland Security Investigations into the activities of Father Lenin Vargas, the prior pastor of St. Joseph Catholic Parish, Starkville, Mississippi and Corpus Christi Catholic Mission, Macon, Mississippi. The investigation led to the indictment of Vargas on ten counts of wire fraud based on alleged fraudulent fundraising activities, in violation of Title 18 United States Code Section 1343. During the ongoing investigation but prior to the grand jury’s return of an indictment, Vargas fled to his home country of Mexico.

In addition, the United States Attorney’s Office and the Catholic Diocese of Jackson have entered into a Deferred Prosecution Agreement. The Deferred Prosecution Agreement is based on the alleged inaction of the Diocese, which allegedly contributed to parishioners continuing to donate money to Vargas, as more fully set forth the Criminal Complaint and Affidavit. The Deferred Prosecution Agreement, which is to be in effect for twelve months, includes a number of remedial measures designed to help ensure that there are no future violations such as those

alleged in the Affidavit. Upon successful completion of the Deferred Prosecution Agreement, all charges against the Catholic Diocese of Jackson will be dismissed. The Diocese has reimbursed identified victims of the alleged fraudulent scheme.

The public is reminded that a Deferred Prosecution Agreement and the indictment are not evidence of guilt and that all individuals are presumed innocent until proven guilty.