News



A woman religious is consoled during a Sept. 13, 2018, protest in Cochin, India, demanding justice after a nun accused Bishop Franco Mulakkal of Jalandhar of raping her. (CNS/Reuters/Sivaram V)



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The case against Bishop Franco Mulakkal, which began in 2018 after a nun accused him of raping her multiple times, went to trial in August 2020. Here are some of the key figures in the case.



Bishop Franco Mulakkal (CNS/Courtesy of the Jullundur Diocese)

Bishop Franco Mulakkal of Jalandhar was born March 25, 1964, in a village in Kerala, southwestern India. He was ordained a priest in April 1990 for the Diocese of Jalandhar in the northern state of Punjab. Mulakkal was appointed the auxiliary bishop of the Latin-rite Catholic Archdiocese of Delhi in January 2009 and consecrated a bishop in February that same year. He was appointed bishop of the Latin-rite Catholic Diocese of Jalandhar in June 2013.

On June 27, 2018, a Catholic nun registered a report with the police in Kottayam, Kerala, accusing Mulakkal of raping her 13 times between 2014 and 2016 in her convent in Kuravilangad, near Kottayam. He was arrested Sept. 21, 2018, and jailed for three weeks. The Kerala High Court granted him bail Oct. 15, 2018. The trial concluded Jan. 10, 2022.

On Jan. 14, the Additional District and Sessions Court in Kottayam acquitted Bishop Franco Mulakkal on charges of wrongful confinement, rape, unnatural sex and criminal intimidation. Mulakkal praised God for the decision and thanked his supporters. Prosecutors and the nun's supporters say they were shocked by the decision and plan to appeal.

The accuser is a former superior general of the Missionaries of Jesus, a congregation that functions under the diocese of Jalandhar. Her name cannot be disclosed under the Indian laws. She has accused Bishop Franco Mulakkal of Jalandhar, the patron of her congregation, of raping her multiple times in their convent in Kuravilangad, a village in Kottayam district of Kerala. She went to the police after her complaints to church leaders in India and the Vatican resulted in no action. On June 27, 2018, she filed a First Information Report with the police in Kottayam, Kerala.

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From left: Missionaries of Jesus Sr. Neena Rose; Franciscan Clarist Sr. Lissy Vadakkel; Missionaries of Jesus Sr. Anupama Kelamangalathuveli (Photos by Saji Thomas)

Sr. Lissy Vadakkel is a member of the Franciscan Clarist Congregation and a retreat preacher. The accuser had disclosed her ordeal to Vadakkel, who shared with the investigating officers what she knew about the case. Vadakkel was a major prosecution witness. She faced lots of pressure from the church, including her congregation, to withdraw her statement to the police.

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Sr. Lucy Kalappura, another member of the Franciscan Clarist Congregation, faced troubles from her congregation and church officials for support the accuser. Kalappura, who was a teacher in Kerala's Wayanad, joined five nun supporters of the rape accuser who had staged a sit-in near the Kerala High Court in Kochi. The congregation subsequently dismissed her citing other reasons such as disobedience.



Sr. Lucy Kalappura ministers to people in Dwarka, near Mananthavady in the Wayanad District of Kerala, India, in 2019. (Saji Thomas)

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Cardinal George Alencherry is the head of the Syro-Malabar Church, and was one of the witnesses in the nun rape case. The accuser had written to him in July 2017 explaining her problems. She also met him November 2017.

Bishop Kurien Valiakandathil of Bhagalpur, a diocese in the eastern Indian state of Bihar, appeared as a witness before the trial court March 12, 2021.

Bishop Sebastian Vadakkel of Ujjain, a diocese in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, another witness, was deposed in the court on Sept. 22, 2021. The accuser had reportedly told this bishop about her ordeal and he advised her not to mention "rape" in her letters to Cardinal George Alencherry and the nuncio.

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Sr. Anupama Kelamangalathuveli, the spokesperson for the survivor and her five supporters, was another witness in the case. She and the other four supporters live with the accuser in their convent in Kuravilangad, a village in Kottayam district, Kerala.



Five Missionaries of Jesus sisters protested the alleged rape of their former superior by a bishop at their Kuravilangad convent in Kerala. Front row, from left, are Josephine Villoonnickal, Ancitta Urumbil and Neena Rose. Second row, from left, are Anupama Kelamangalathuveli and Alphy Pallasseril. (Saji Thomas)

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Shaiju Antony is the joint convener of Save Our Sisters, a movement started in September 2018 to support the accuser and her supporters.

Judge G. Gopakumar of the Additional District and Sessions Court heard the trial of the rape case.

Jithesh J. Babu was the public prosecutor in the case.

Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Giambattista Diquattro was to whom the accuser wrote explaining her problems in January 2018 and again in June 2018, as there was no response. The nuncio allegedly took no action.



Archbishop Giambattista Diquattro (center), who was apostolic nuncio to India and Nepal from Jan. 21, 2017, to Aug. 29, 2020, with a group of Christian media persons in New Delhi on April 25, 2018 (Provided photo)

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