

# Leader of Mexican Church La Luz Del Mundo Charged With Sex Crimes in Los Angeles

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Naasón Joaquín García at the 2017 annual Holy Convocation of La Luz del Mundo in Guadalajara. He is charged with more than a dozen sex crimes in Los Angeles County. Ulises Ruiz/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

By Mihir Zaveri

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The leader of La Luz del Mundo, a church with its headquarters in Mexico that claims to have more than one million followers worldwide, was charged Tuesday in Los Angeles with more than a dozen sex crimes, including allegations that he forced children to have sex and made them pose naked for photos, the authorities in California said.

The leader, Naasón Joaquín García, 50, was arrested Monday at Los Angeles International Airport, according to the California attorney general’s office. Mr. García is considered by La Luz del Mundo, which has locations in the Los Angeles area, to be an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Three other people affiliated with the organization were also charged Tuesday, according to the attorney general’s office. One of the people was also arrested at the Los Angeles airport, another was arrested elsewhere in Los Angeles County, and the authorities are still seeking the arrest of the fourth person, the attorney general’s office said.

In a 19-page complaint filed in Los Angeles County Superior Court on Tuesday, prosecutors said there were four victims, three of whom were children. One child and a woman were raped, prosecutors said in the complaint. Mr. García is also accused of human trafficking and forcing children to perform oral sex.

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The crimes occurred from 2015 until 2018 in Los Angeles County, the authorities said.

One of the people told a group of girls that if they went against the desires of Mr. García, “they were going against god,” according to the complaint. Children were told to perform “flirty” dances for Mr. García wearing “as little clothing as possible,” according to the complaint.

The complaint said Mr. García gave a group of children “a speech about a king having mistresses and stated that an apostle of god can never be judged for his actions.”

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“Crimes like those alleged in this complaint have no place in our society. Period,” Attorney General Xavier Becerra of California [said in a statement](#) Tuesday. “We must not turn a blind eye to sexual violence and trafficking in our state.”

In a statement, David Correa, a spokesman from the headquarters of La Luz del Mundo, said that Mr. García had always acted with respect toward “the dignity of people.”

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“We reject categorically the false accusations against him,” the statement said.

“The church is standing behind the apostle of Jesus Christ,” said Cesia Minemann, the United States spokeswoman for the church, referring to Mr. García.

“We trust fully in his integrity, and we trust the legal system and the justice system,” she said in a phone interview on Wednesday. “We understand that allegations have been made, but as the state attorney general said in the press release, these allegations are merely that — allegations.”

The attorney general’s office said it began its investigation in 2018 after someone sent information to the “clergy abuse online complaint form.”

Prosecutors did not answer further questions about the case, the investigation or the organization. Mr. García’s bail was originally set at \$25 million, but it was raised to \$50 million on Tuesday. Mr. García was being held on Wednesday evening, and the attorney general’s office said he was expected to be arraigned on Monday morning.

La Luz del Mundo, which translates to “The Light of the World” in English, was founded in 1926, according to the church’s website. It claims to have more than one million followers worldwide and has been deemed by religious experts as one of the fastest-growing religious groups in the country.

It [teaches](#) that Jesus Christ is the son of God, and that church leaders, like Mr. García, are his apostles. Its main building in Guadalajara is a soaring white and gold structure with a tiered roof that is often lit up in rainbow colors at night.

Samuel Joaquín Flores, the previous church leader who died in 2014, was subject to child sex abuse allegations reported in local media — which he reportedly denied — but no criminal charges were ever brought against him.

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[Questions have also been raised](#) about the church’s political connections and influence, including [reports](#) last month that an opera concert at a well-known cultural center, the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City, was held in part to celebrate Mr. García’s 50th birthday.

Only hours after the announcement of Mr. García’s arrest, several opinion leaders in Mexico expressed outrage on social media over the alleged tribute paid to Mr. García last month.

The concert held at the Palacio de Bellas Artes stirred controversy, with critics saying Mexico’s secular state could not use public venues for religious purposes. The secretary of culture, Alejandra Frausto, denied granting a request for such homage, saying it was only supposed to be a concert.

“Bellas Artes has been used to pay tribute to someone who has just been detained for pederasty and child pornography,” Esteban Illades, a journalist, wrote on [Twitter](#) on Tuesday. “There must be consequences, and serious ones, for the Secretary of Culture after this.”

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