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Bishop charged over fondling woman in casino

By **DAVID YONKE**

BLADE RELIGION EDITOR

Bishop Demetri Khoury of Toledo, who oversees eight states and Ontario for the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church, was arrested at a Michigan casino for allegedly fondling a woman, officials said yesterday.

The 54-year-old bishop, one of five in the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, was highly intoxicated Wednesday night when he grabbed the breast of a woman who was seated at a nearby slot machine in the Turtle Creek Casino near Traverse City, said Trooper Paul Kushner, the arresting officer.

The bishop was not wearing clerical garb, but told Trooper Kushner that he was an Orthodox bishop.

"He used some nonbishop type language - a lot of profanity," Trooper Kushner said.

Bishop Demetri, who was released on \$25,000 bond from the Grand Traverse County Correctional Facility, was charged with criminal sexual conduct, a fourth-degree felony. If convicted, he faces up to two years in jail, a \$500 fine, and mandatory HIV/sexually transmitted disease testing, according to Grand Traverse County Prosecutor Dennis LaBelle.

The bishop also was charged with a misdemeanor offense of drunk and disorderly conduct. If convicted of that offense, he could face a 90-day sentence and/or fine of \$500.

Trooper Kushner said the private security firm at Turtle Creek Casino, which is operated by the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, normally handles complaints involving drunk and disorderly patrons. But the trooper said law enforcement officials are called "when they become belligerent or the situation becomes more of a crime rather than just a problem."

The incident was recorded on the casino's video surveillance system, Trooper Kushner said, adding that the picture quality was "crystal-clear."

Mr. LaBelle, who said he watched the videotape yesterday, said the victim, an unidentified woman from North Carolina, initially complained about Bishop Demetri's behavior to casino security, who told him he was no longer allowed to drink.

The cleric remained seated at a slot machine and the woman returned to a seat near him, Mr. LaBelle said.

"When Bishop Demetri got up to leave, he patted the victim on the left shoulder, above the upper arm," Mr. LaBelle said. "She didn't do anything. Then as he moved behind her, he reached over, around the front of her left arm, and touched her left breast. The woman got up and retaliated, and tried to slap Bishop Demetri a couple of times."

The woman reported the incident to casino security, who then called the Michigan State Police just before 10 p.m. Wednesday.

The bishop appeared to be so intoxicated that he could not remember his address, Trooper Kushner said, and produced a Florida driver's license with a Miami street address.

No Breathalyzer test was administered, Mr. LaBelle said, largely because the suspect was not driving.

Bishop Demetri has been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, which can cause bodily shakes and other medical problems. He could not be reached for comment by phone and there was no answer last night at his Old Orchard home. Church officials in Toledo, Detroit, and the denomination's national headquarters in Englewood, N.J., either declined comment or could not be reached yesterday.

A native of Ramallah, in the West Bank, Bishop Demetri was ordained as a priest in 1975 and consecrated as a bishop on March 12, 1995. He oversees approximately 45 churches in the Midwest region, which includes Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Kentucky, West Virginia, and in Ontario.

There are two Antiochian Orthodox churches in the Toledo area, St. George Orthodox Cathedral on Woodley Road and St. Elias on Harroun Road in Sylvania.

Church members working the crowded annual St. George Summerfest last night were disheartened by the news of the bishop's arrest.

"He's been a great leader," said John Ellis, president of the parish council at St. George, declining further comment.

The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, which has 450,000 members, was established in the late 19th century. It is under the supervision of the Patriarch and Holy Synod of Antioch, headquartered in Damascus, which traces its roots to the start of Christianity.

Bishop Demetri, who like all Antiochian Orthodox bishops has taken a vow of celibacy, served as a pastor in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Florida before being appointed a bishop and assigned to the Toledo chancery in 1995.

His arraignment in Michigan's 86th District Court in Traverse City is scheduled for Aug. 1.
