Calabar cleric gets double life sentence for serial rape

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A Family Court sitting in Calabar, Cross River State, has handed down two life sentences to Apostle Favour Okoise, the self-styled General Overseer of The Refiner’s Fire Church, following convictions in two separate rape cases involving multiple victims, including a 16-year-old girl.  
  
The court, presided over by Family High Court 2, delivered its judgment on June 16 and 17, 2025, after finding the Edo State-born cleric guilty of multiple counts of rape, defilement of a minor, and obtaining by false pretenses.  
  
In the first case, Okoise was convicted on three counts of rape involving three adult women and one count of fraudulently obtaining benefits under false pretenses. The second case centered on the rape of a 16-year-old girl, for which he received an additional life sentence and was ordered to pay ₦1,000,000 in restitution to the survivor.  
  
Prosecuted by the Cross River State Ministry of Justice through the Department of Public Prosecutions (DPP), led by Okoi E. Ukam, Esq., and handled in court by Cletus Adama, Esq., the trial began in 2023 and culminated in a judgment that observers described as a landmark ruling for sexual violence cases in the state.  
  
Legal counsel to the victims, Doris Nduanusi, Esq., revealed that the convict used spiritual manipulation to exploit female congregants, convincing them that sex was a divine requirement for spiritual initiation. “He called it a ‘special dealing’ with the Holy Spirit,” she said.  
  
Despite being remanded since February 2024, members of the church were allegedly misled to believe Okoise was on a spiritual retreat. “It was only after the conviction that the reality began to dawn on them,” Nduanusi noted, describing the cleric as unrepentant throughout the trial.  
  
The case received significant backing from civil society, notably the Gender and Development Action (GADA), led by Ambassador Nkoyo Toyo, who partnered with the Ministry of Justice to support the victims and ensure a successful outcome.