

The woman who punched a lector during a Philly Cathedral Mass won't be charged, police say

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Byline: Jeremy Roebuck, The Philadelphia Inquirer

Body

Aug. 25--The woman caught on video punching a lector during Sunday Mass at the Cathedral Basilica of SS. Peter and Paul will not be charged with a crime, authorities said.

Philadelphia police said in a statement late Monday that they had identified the woman in a green track suit whose attack was broadcast live over the internet during services at the central church of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia. But they did not release her name and said that they had "deferred" charges against her while their investigation continued.

However, two sources familiar with that investigation said Tuesday, that investigators decided to seek alternatives to prosecution because the woman is struggling with mental health issues.

Video shows woman punched during Mass at SS. Peter and PaulThe decision was made in consultation with church officials and the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office, said the sources, who were not authorized to speak publicly about the case.

An archdiocesan spokesperson did not respond to requests to confirm that account of the decision making. The District Attorney's Office said in a statement that its prosecutors were "in constant communication [with police] about investigations, including this one. As this incident has not been referred to our office for prosecution, it would be inappropriate for us to comment further."

The attack shocked many of the region's Catholic faithful, including many who watched it play out live about 32 minutes into the cathedral's Sunday Mass livestream. Archived video shows the attacker, in her green track suit and a surgical mask, hovering near the front of the pews for several minutes as the lector finished her reading and head back down the church's central aisle.

As the lector approached, the attacker stepped forward, punched her in the face twice, then marched out of the camera's view while priests and churchgoers looked on in stunned silence.

The victim -- whom archdiocesan officials identified Monday as Sarah Contrucci, 40, and a longtime lector at the church -- did not require medical treatment.

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A panhandler punched a Chinese American woman and called her a slur. Will it be considered a hate crime? She told CBS3 Monday that she heard her attacker mumble something about "respect" and "God" before she threw the first punch.

"I saw somebody there that clearly seemed to be waiting there, and I was a little worried that she was going to attempt to make a scene of some sort, to disrupt the Mass," she said. "So I was thinking that I wanted to do whatever I could to keep the situation calm and respectful, and so I just wanted to get back to my pew."

Archbishop Nelson J. Pérez condemned the attack in a statement Sunday saying that "such behavior is unacceptable at all times."

Though he added: "Please join me in praying for everyone involved in today's incident and for respect for our fellow brothers and sisters."

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

During the 11:00 a.m. Mass at Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter & Paul, which was...

Posted by Archbishop Nelson Perez on Sunday, August 23, 2020 The cathedral will strengthen security protocols for future services, cathedral rector the Rev. Dennis Gill said.

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