

BishopAccountability.org

Runaway Priests
Hiding in Plain Sight

In the Shadow of the Vatican

Accused Clerics Serving in Rome, Heart of the Catholic Church

One in an occasional series

By Reese Dunklin
Dallas Morning News
September 12, 2004

<http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/religion/stories/091204dnrelrome.bc6c5.html>

[See also the case studies on Revs. [James Tully](#), [Edgar Hidalgo](#), [Barry Bossa](#), [Julian Fox](#), [John Baptist Ormechea](#), and [Joseph Henn](#). The main article and case studies were also released as a series of four PDFs [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#). See [earlier articles](#) in the Runaway Priests series.]

ROME – Pope John Paul II summoned U.S. cardinals to the Vatican two years ago, at the height of the church's sex abuse crisis, and made a stirring pronouncement.



The dome of St. Peter's Basilica is recognized by most of the world as a symbol of the Catholic Church. It is also an everyday sight for several priests convicted or accused of molestation who live and work in comfort in Rome.

"People need to know," he stressed to them, "that there is no place in the priesthood and religious life for those who would harm the young."

Yet today, one block from the Vatican, a fugitive priest lives in a church building with rooftop views of St. Peter's Basilica and the pope's apartment. The Rev. Joseph Henn's superiors have let him stay with them, even though they say he has refused their instructions to go back to Phoenix and face charges that he molested three boys.



The Rev. Joseph Henn is a U.S. fugitive wanted on 13 molestation charges. He refuses to return to Phoenix, and his order has let him stay in Rome.

A short cab ride north, the Rev. Barry Bossa, an ex-con and fugitive, has found similar sanctuary in a leafy neighborhood of sidewalk cafes and low-rise apartments. His religious bosses hastily moved him out of the United States two years ago as his criminal record and new allegations began to emerge.

Here in the heart of Catholicism, church leaders are giving refuge to priests who face allegations of sexual abuse in other countries. The *Dallas Morning News* located the men – some of them admitted abusers – as part of a yearlong investigation into the global movements of accused priests.

Some are stationed in the comfort of their religious orders' world headquarters. One strolls by St. Peter's Square en route to his job. Another leads English-language tours at ancient church burial grounds. And until recently, one man was serving his house arrest across the street from the Vatican.



The Rev. James Tully (in jacket) passes through St. Peter's Square. He was assigned to Rome two years ago, Shortly after he was accused of sexual misconduct for the third time. Photo by Mona Reeder / Staff Photographer.

The priests would not discuss their cases at length. Their supervisors said they did not assign the men to Rome to help them elude law enforcement or victims. The goal, they said, was to give the priests a place to live and work away from children.

"It's not the worst place in the world; that's true," said the Rev. Michael Higgins, the Passionist order's American leader. Last year, he sent to Rome a priest who had been investigated, but not prosecuted, on abuse claims. "But it's not a reward."

A former top administrator at a Catholic college near the Vatican said placing accused and even fugitive priests in Rome was "very detrimental" – especially at a time when the church is trying to restore its battered image.

"I don't think they understand taking those people over there is a scandal," said the Rev. Lawrence Breslin, a retired priest who was the second-in-command at Pontifical North American College. "Rome is the center of the church. People see it as a holy place. It is not a place for harboring criminals."

Several of the priests' superiors said they did not notify the Diocese of Rome about the men and were not obligated to do so because they were not staffing parishes. The bishop of the diocese is Pope John Paul II.

Of the seven accused priests The News located in Rome, Father Henn was the only one registered at the diocese's offices, according to the Rev. Marco Fibbi, a diocesan spokesman. Neither Father Fibbi nor Father Henn's bosses would say whether the diocese was told about the criminal charges, which were filed after Father Henn arrived.

Father Fibbi referred further questions to the pope's chief Vatican spokesman, Joaquín Navarro-Valls. He did not respond to interview requests.

Dr. Navarro-Valls previously declined to comment on The News' investigation, which found more than 200 accused priests, brothers and other Catholic workers hiding across international borders and living in unsuspecting communities, often with the church's support. About 30 of the men were wanted by law enforcement in another country.

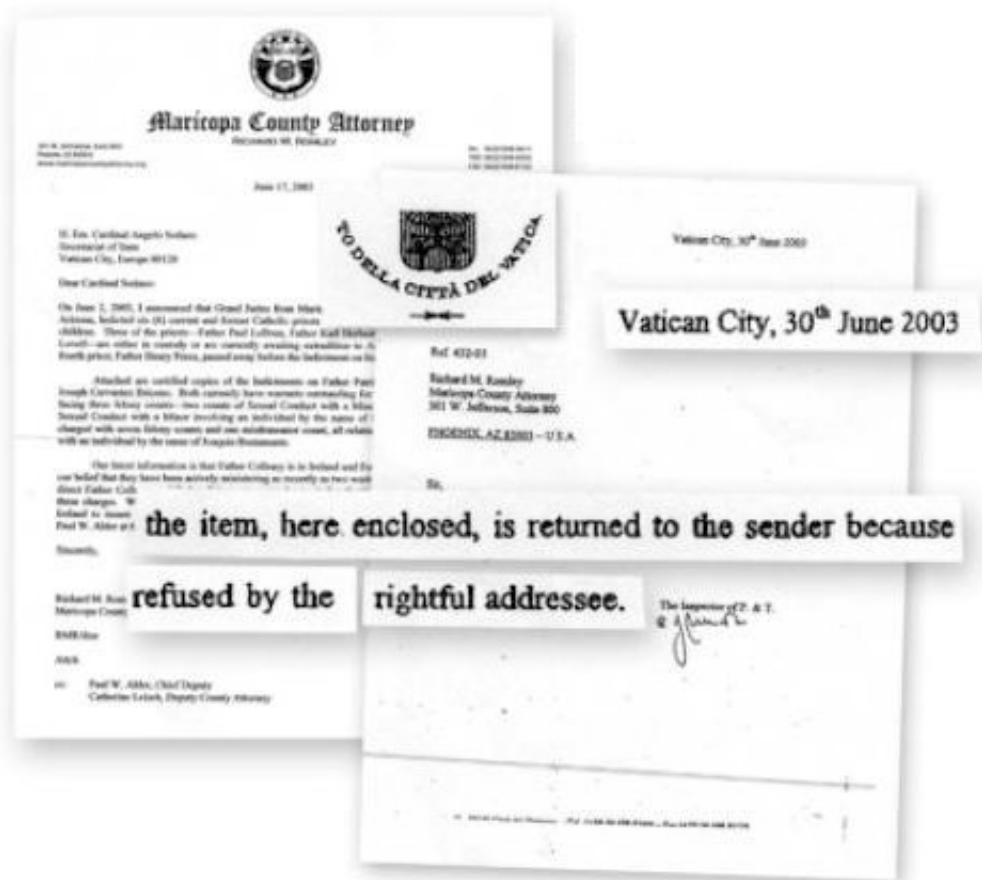
Prosecutors filed charges against Father Henn and Father Bossa last year and are seeking their extradition from Italy. State Department and Italian officials would not comment on the status of the requests. The extradition process can sometimes take years to complete.

One of those prosecutors, Maricopa County Attorney Rick Romley of Arizona, was rebuffed last year when he asked the Vatican to order two other fugitive priests to surrender. They had fled Phoenix for Mexico and Ireland.

The prosecutor's letter to the Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, was sent back resealed, along with a note: "The item, here enclosed, is returned to the sender because refused by the rightful addressee."



Phoenix prosecutor Rick Romley is frustrated that the Vatican won't order fugitives to surrender. David Kadlubowski / Special Contributor.



Mr. Romley said he saw no point in writing to the Vatican when Father Henn was indicted about a month later. He understands that the Vatican has no authority to extradite Father Henn, but he believes it could use its church power to pressure the priest to return to Phoenix.

"Clearly there are formal charges here," said Mr. Romley, who was raised a Catholic. "They [priests] give a vow of obedience. It seems like it is real easy to say, 'You shall return, and if not, we defrock you.'"

President Bush's chief representative to the Vatican – the only religious institution recognized as a sovereign nation – refused to comment on its handling of clergy abuse matters. Ambassador Jim Nicholson "does not comment on church business," his spokeswoman said.

Slow to act

Despite the pope's tough talk, the Vatican has moved slowly in dealing with a scandal that has cost the church hundreds of millions of dollars in payments to victims and led to the resignations of several bishops who sheltered priests.

Shortly after the pope met with the cardinals in spring 2002, leaders of the U.S. church gathered in Dallas and passed an aggressive "zero tolerance" policy for molesters. But the Vatican balked, saying several parts of the policy were not in line with church law, and ordered changes. Among them: imposing a deadline for complaints, which in effect allows many abusers to go unpunished.

Even after Rome and the U.S. bishops hashed out the policy's details, the Vatican continued to employ an acknowledged abuser as a foreign diplomat. The Vatican had promoted the Rev. Daniel Pater despite his 1995 financial settlement with an Ohio victim and two warnings from Monsignor Breslin. Then in late 2002, it moved him up again, this time to temporarily run the papal embassy in India. He stepped down last year, as The News was preparing a story about the case.

And the Vatican has kept former Boston Cardinal Bernard Law, the U.S. church leader most associated with protecting priests, on several decision-making panels and recently gave him a job leading a historic Roman basilica.

"There is this gulf between saying the right thing but not appropriately following through with the right actions," said Brother Barry Coldrey of Australia, a church historian who has written extensively about clergy abuse.

Four years ago, the Vatican made Brother Coldrey, a member of the Christian Brothers order, remove from the Internet his book, *Religious Life Without Integrity: The Sexual Abuse Crisis in the Catholic Church*. A Vatican letter to Brother Coldrey said: "We question the prudence of publishing such a document."

"The response should be cleanup," Brother Coldrey said, "but it is still all too often cover-up."

The Vatican has long refused to address why it has not acted on numerous abuse complaints made against a close ally of the pope, the Rev. Marcial Maciel, the revered founder and leader of the Legion of Christ order in Rome.



The Vatican won't say what happened to an abuse inquiry of the Rev. Marcial Maciel, who is close to Pope John Paul II. Father Maciel says he is innocent. File photo 1997.

Two of his nine accusers appealed several times to the Vatican in the 1970s and 1980s, with no results. The Vatican finally agreed in 1999 to review the alleged incidents, which the men said happened in Spain and Italy when they were young boys and seminarians. But a few months later, the Vatican mysteriously suspended the inquiry without ever taking testimony from the men, according to *Vows of Silence*, a new book by Jason Berry and Gerald Renner, investigative journalists who first reported the Maciel saga.

Alberto Athié, a former priest who had worked at a charity run by Mexico's bishops, told *The News* that his career stalled after he notified Mexico City Cardinal Norberto Rivera and Vatican Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger about the allegations against Father Maciel. The cardinals wouldn't comment.

"I was told that Maciel was very beloved of the pope, that he had done a lot of good for the church, and that it wasn't convenient to do anything to look into the accusations," said Mr. Athié, who subsequently quit the priesthood.

Father Maciel, who has repeatedly declared his innocence, continues to enjoy support from John Paul. The

pope celebrated the Legion's 60th anniversary in St. Peter's Square in 2001 and told a crowd: "I extend a particularly affectionate greeting to your dear founder, Father Marcial Maciel, whom I heartily congratulate at this significant juncture."

'Lost in the crowd'

The sidewalks and streets around the Vatican are brimming with clergy, seminarians and Catholic pilgrims of all nationalities. Cardinals and bishops, in their scarlet and purple vestments, meander through the scores of people. Police cars whiz by occasionally, escorting limousines with foreign dignitaries into the Vatican.

"You can stand out there in St. Peter's Square and hear 50 languages spoken. You're just lost in the crowd," said Monsignor Breslin, the former college administrator in Rome. "No one will look at you and think you're a criminal."

One sunny day this summer, the Rev. James Tully navigated his way past tourists in St. Peter's Square without interruption and headed for a yellow Vatican postal box on the side of St. Peter's Basilica, where the pope regularly blesses the faithful. Father Tully dropped in a couple of letters, then walked on to a nearby bus stop.

Father Tully, who declined to be interviewed, was moved to Rome two years ago, about a month after he was accused of sexual misconduct for the third time.

The priest had pleaded no contest to disorderly conduct in 1992 for giving three boys alcohol and grabbing one of them on the inner thigh during a baseball game in Milwaukee. Father Tully's therapist wrote a letter during that case in which he said the priest "had never denied responsibility for his sexual behavior."

An official with Father Tully's Xaverian Missionary Fathers order said his transfer to Rome had nothing to do with abuse allegations. The priest was recovering from the stress of working in war-torn parts of Africa, the official said, and was not ready for parish ministry in the United States.

In the pope's backyard

ABOUT THE VATICAN
 It is the world's smallest sovereign nation, surrounded entirely by the city of Rome. It has diplomatic relations with 174 countries and participates in the United Nations. It has no extradition treaty with the United States.

ROME

VATICAN CITY

Villa Borghese

Castle Sant'Angelo

Tiber River

Pantheon

Colosseum

Diocese of Rome headquarters

The Rev. Barry Bossa: Left the United States after his criminal past and new abuse complaints emerged in 2002.

The Rev. Edgar Hidalgo: Served house arrest with his religious society across from a main Vatican City entrance. He was recently jailed.

The Rev. Joseph Henn: Remains at his order's world headquarters, one block from St. Peter's Square, despite criminal charges.

The Rev. James Tully: Works near St. Peter's Square for an umbrella organization of the world's religious order leaders.

The Rev. John Baptist Ormechea: Works at his order's headquarters next to a basilica and overlooking ruins such as the Colosseum.

0 Mile 1/4

Elsewhere in Rome

ROME

Via della Pisenna

Via Appia Pignatelli

Via Prenestina

SS1

A24

E80

SS6

A1 DIR

0 Mile 1

Clampino Airport

The Rev. Marcial Maciel: The Vatican has left him as head of the Legion of Christ order in Rome despite abuse complaints.

The Rev. Richard Mataconis: Leads English-language tours at ancient church burial grounds.

The Rev. Julian Fox: Was recently promoted to his order's Rome offices to work in its communications department.

A few miles south of the Vatican, the Rev. Richard Mataconis works as an English-language guide at the Catacombs of St. Callistus, a popular stop for Catholics visiting Rome. He mingles with the adults and children on his tours, talking them through the ancient burial sites of popes and Catholic martyrs.

Father Mataconis was sued two years ago by two men who accused him of abusing them in the 1970s at the New York junior seminary they attended. The suit ultimately was dismissed because the men had missed the deadline for filing a legal claim.



The Rev. Richard Mataconis works as a tour guide at the Catacombs of St. Callistus, regularly interacting with visiting children and adults. Two years ago, two men sued the priest, accusing him of abusing them at a New York junior seminary in the 1970s. Their suit was dismissed because of a missed filing deadline. Photo by Cecilia Fabiano / Special Contributor.

The priest, a member of the Salesians of Don Bosco religious order, would not agree to an interview. Salesian officials said they could not discuss the accusations, the circumstances of his transfer to Rome or his current assignments, citing pending litigation against the order.

"We trust that you understand our position," their attorney said.

Not talking

Father Barry Bossa was chatting in the second-floor hallway of his order's offices one afternoon when a doorman told him he had company.

"A visitor? For me?" he replied enthusiastically.

His expression quickly turned sour, though. The visitor was a reporter, and Father Bossa was in no mood to discuss the abuse complaints against him.

"My lips are sealed," he responded emphatically to a few questions, before ducking into a room.

Father Bossa came to this urban neighborhood – dotted with shops and restaurants, and buzzing with well-dressed professionals – days after he abruptly left his parish in Yonkers, N.Y., two years ago.

The New York Archdiocese had learned that the priest pleaded guilty in 1974 to a reduced charge of misdemeanor sexual abuse – a detail his religious order, the Pallottines, had failed to share. New York Cardinal Edward Egan stripped Father Bossa of his ability to minister in the archdiocese, and the priest departed Yonkers so swiftly that his sister had to come retrieve his belongings.

At the time of the assault on a 12-year-old boy, Father Bossa was a lay Catholic teacher. The Pallottines were aware of his conviction when he sought in 1976 to join the order, said the Rev. Terzo Vinci, a colleague who monitored Father Bossa in the United States. The Pallottines accepted him because he promised not to relapse, Father Vinci said.

As his criminal record was resurfacing in 2002, Father Bossa was hit with new allegations in Massachusetts.

Several men told the Boston Archdiocese that the priest had abused them in the mid-1970s, when they were young boys and he was teaching at a Bridgewater, Mass., parish. Sometimes, he had sex with the boys after checking them out of grammar school and taking them to a nearby church office, according to records and interviews.

Massachusetts authorities filed criminal charges against Father Bossa in early 2003, several months after he had moved to Rome.

Father Vinci said the Pallottines are not trying to protect Father Bossa from authorities. They moved him to Rome to isolate him from children, Father Vinci said, and now he is unable to return to the United States because of his health.



A police officer patrols St. Peter's Square, where the Pope regularly blesses pilgrims. Pope John Paul II has said there is no place in the priesthood for molesters.

"It's not a promotion," he said. "Possibly some lay people have this perception, 'He went to Rome. Oh, he's with the pope.' He went to Rome in exile. Zero promotion. Zero anything."

One of the four accusers in the Massachusetts criminal case said he was surprised when he learned that the Pallottines had given Father Bossa a home in Rome.

"Right there, right by the pope. Nice," said the man, who spoke on the condition he not be named. "You would think they would want them out of there."

Order lets him stay

Each day, the tourists walking to St. Peter's Square pass the Salvatorian order's world headquarters and its

signature large green double doors.



The Rev. Joseph Henn lives and works behind these double doors at the Salvatorian order's Rome headquarters, which has a hotel and tourist center. He comes and goes as he pleases, even though he is wanted on U.S. criminal charges.

Father Joseph Henn, a fugitive, lives behind those doors. He comes and goes easily, just one more anonymous person on Rome's streets.

His accommodations are pleasant. The headquarters' first floor has a tranquil garden courtyard with a fountain and begonias, a hotel and a tourist information center. Upstairs are offices, a chapel and a large kitchen and cafeteria, where the pope ate lunch during a visit a few years ago. And the rooftop patio offers a panoramic view of imposing St. Peter's Basilica and other Roman landmarks.

Father Henn already was living here, doing administrative work, by the time authorities began targeting him last year as part of a broader abuse investigation into the Phoenix Diocese.

Church officials had received complaints long ago from parents that he was fondling their sons, records show. The diocese had even made a confidential payout to one accuser in the early 1990s. But those allegations were not forwarded to law enforcement, according to the Maricopa County attorney's office.

When a reporter approached Father Henn in the courtyard, he was exasperated by questions about his criminal case and his life in Rome.

"I was hoping the lawyers had worked to make sure that everything was sort of finished," he said, declining to specifically address the allegations. "What I'm a little bit frustrated [about] is you may be opening everything back up to prosecution."

Salvatorian officials would not agree to an interview or address when and why Father Henn was sent to Rome. They said in a written statement that it was their "clear expectation" that Father Henn would heed their request to go back and answer the 13-count indictment against him.

He has refused. And the order has let him stay.

"That doesn't sit well with me," said one of Father Henn's accusers, Rick Rivezzo, who is suing the Phoenix Diocese. "He knew what was going on, and he was there for a reason – to hide."

Mr. Romley, the prosecutor, said his office tried to talk Father Henn into returning voluntarily. The costly, cumbersome process of extradition is the only resort now. Mr. Romley knows from experience that he can't count on the Vatican's help.

"It doesn't seem like they're putting forward the very best foot to really make a difference and say, 'You will be held accountable, and this is not going to occur again,' " he said. "And that's the bottom line."

Staff writer Brendan M. Case and special contributor Anna Zammit in Rome contributed to this report.

E-mail rdunklin@dallasnews.com

About This Series

The Dallas Morning News spent a year tracking the international movement of Catholic priests accused of sexual abuse. Reporters traveled extensively, conducted hundreds of interviews, reviewed thousands of pages of church and law enforcement documents, and built a database with more than 200 cases.

The findings

- **Nearly half of the cases we identified involve clergy who tried to elude law enforcement.** About 30 remain free in one country while facing ongoing criminal inquiries, arrest warrants or convictions in another.
- **Catholic leaders have used international transfers to thwart justice**, posing far greater challenges to law officers than the domestic moves exposed in the U.S. church's 2002 scandal.
- **Police and prosecutors, however, often fail** to take basic steps to catch fugitive priests.
- **Priests** who can't work in this country because of the U.S. church's new sexual abuse policy **are in ministry abroad.**

The team

Reporters: Reese Dunklin, Brendan M. Case and Brooks Egerton

Staff Photographers: Mona Reeder, Cheryl Diaz Meyer and Eric Schlegel

Graphic Artist: Sergio Pecanha

Designers: Cindy Smith and Rob Schneider

Copy Editors: Laura Roddy Brown and Becky Williams

News Assistant: Javier Garcia

Photo Editors: Jodie Steck and Chris Wilkins

Project Editor: Pam Maples

Contact Us

Do you have information about this issue? Please contact us at 214-977-8118 or runawaypriest@dallasmorningnews.com.

Log on to DallasNews.com to read earlier stories in this series.

Any original material on these pages is copyright © BishopAccountability.org 2004. Reproduce freely with attribution.