

RUNAWAY PRIESTS



HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

“I don’t think they understand taking those people over there is a scandal. Rome is the center of the church. People see it as a holy place. It is not a place for harboring criminals.”

The Rev. **Lawrence Breslin**, a former college administrator in Rome



CECILIA FABIANO/Special Contributor

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.

Rome isn't a reward, church leaders say

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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, the men said, he had sex with them after checking them out of grammar school and taking them to a nearby church office.

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.

“It’s not a promotion,” he said. “Possibly some laypeople 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.

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 tar-

getting 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.

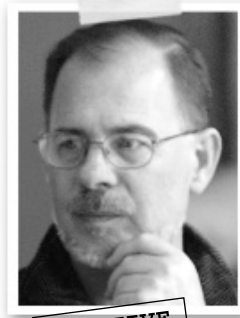
The Rev. Joseph “Joe” Henn

ROME CASE STUDY #6

In mid-2003, while living in Rome, he was indicted on 13 molestation charges involving assaults on three Phoenix boys decades earlier. Prosecutors sought extradition after he refused to return voluntarily.

CURRENTLY

He lives in the Salvatorian religious order’s worldwide headquarters.



HISTORY

In the early 1980s, allegations circulated among parents in Phoenix that Father Henn was acting inappropriately with their children, according to documents and interviews. One mother reported the priest to church officials after her son confided that Father Henn had molested him. Within weeks, the priest was gone, according to a statement the son gave criminal investigators last year. A spokeswoman for the Phoenix Diocese did not return messages but has previously said there was no record of a complaint. The son, Richard Rivezzo, has filed a lawsuit against the diocese. In the 1990s, the diocese paid a confidential settlement to another former parishioner who had accused Father Henn of abusing him when he was younger, according to documents from the Maricopa County attorney’s office in Phoenix. That man declined to talk to *The News*. Maricopa County officials said authorities were not told about Father Henn before the recent criminal investigation.

THE PRIEST SAYS

He said his lawyers were working to “make sure that everything was sort of finished” and would not comment further.

THE SALVATORIANS SAY

Officials refused interview requests. In a written statement, the order’s U.S. and Rome leaders insisted they had told Father Henn to return to Phoenix and answer the charges. He refused to do so, and they let him stay.

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.**

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MONA REEDER/Staff Photographer

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.