News

A white man wearing a clerical collar with styled, swoopy hair looks into the camera

Fr .Alex Crow, former parochial vicar at Corpus Christi Parish in Mobile, Ala., is pictured in an undated photo. Crow, who abandoned his Alabama parish in July 2023 and fled to Italy with a recent Catholic high school graduate, has returned to the U.S., with the Archdiocese of Mobile noting that his priestly faculties remain suspended. (OSV News/Courtesy of Archdiocese of Mobile)

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The Archdiocese of Mobile, Alabama, has launched its own investigation regarding disgraced priest Fr. Alex Crow, who fled his pastoral assignment in July and traveled to Italy with a recent female graduate of an archdiocesan high school, and who remains with her in that country.

Archbishop Thomas J. Rodi announced the news in a video statement released Sept. 29 on the archdiocese's Office of Religious Education YouTube channel.

The internal investigation, which will be conducted "with the assistance of outside counsel," aims to "try and better better understand how Alex Crow conducted himself while he was a priest in this archdiocese with adults and minors, and the

nature of his relationship with the young woman in question during a critical time when she was a student," said the archbishop.

The announcement marks the fourth such ongoing inquiry into the matter. The Mobile County District Attorney's Office and the Mobile County Sheriff's Office are conducting active investigations, and the family of the young woman has retained Mobile attorney Christine Hernandez to pursue civil action.

All of the investigations seek to determine whether Crow sexually groomed the young woman while she was a minor, and whether other teens -- with whom the priest had extensive interactions during his pastoral ministry -- also were targeted.

Hernandez and the young woman's family say that sexual grooming, not romance, is the basis for Crow's interest and actions.

Crow, who was ordained in June 2021 and had served as a parochial vicar at Corpus Christi Parish in Mobile, abruptly left his assignment July 24, a day after celebrating Sunday Mass.

The 30-year-old priest flew to Italy with an 18-year-old woman who is a recent graduate of McGill-Toolen Catholic High School. Crow also attended the school from 2007-2011 and provided pastoral ministry to students, although school officials have denied Crow was formally employed or had ever chaperoned school trips or retreats.

Crow had left behind a letter to the Archdiocese of Mobile stating he had no intention of returning to the U.S. He and the young woman were located in Italy by a family member of the woman, and are believed to still be in that country's Tuscany region. The woman has not been publicly identified.

An additional letter written by the priest to the young woman prior to their departure -- and prior to her 18th birthday, according to Hernandez -- indicated he believed the two to be "married." In a separate letter to his brother Joshua, Crow claimed he was following "Jesus' will" by permanently leaving the U.S. with the young woman, who "has been told to come with me." He said he was not leaving the priesthood.

Rodi removed Crow's priestly faculties in late July, advising he could no longer minister, present himself or dress as a priest, and ordering him to return home immediately under his priestly promise of obedience.

In August, the archbishop announced he planned to initiate the canonical procedure for dismissing Crow from the clerical state, a process (popularly but incorrectly called "defrocking") that, according to church law, may be initiated six months after the time Crow abandoned his assignment.

Rodi said in his Sept. 29 video message that to his knowledge "no one ever accused Alex Crow of sexual misconduct of any kind prior to his departure in July" or "personally raised concerns about Alex Crow and sexual misconduct."

The archbishop admitted the archdiocese had received "reports about Alex Crow's behavior with the young woman in question on a trip in June following her graduation, and shortly before their departure," referencing an informal tour of Italy organized for 2023 McGill-Toolen graduates by a local company.

Those reports "did not allege sexual misconduct," but the archdiocese began investigating, said the archbishop.

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However, "I did receive complaints by some about (Father Crow's) ministry, his preaching, and whether he was acting in accordance with church teaching," the archbishop said.

Crow had often expressed an interest in demonology, and frequently gave talks on that subject and on the alleged apparitions of Mary in Garabandal, Spain, which a succession of local bishops have ruled as not of supernatural origin.

Upon the priest's departure, the archdiocese notified law enforcement "out of an abundance of caution" and because it "understood that law enforcement would be in the best position to investigate and assist the young woman's family," said the archbishop.

OSV News has learned that at least four Airbnb hosts located in San Gimignano -- a picturesque medieval town popular with tourists -- have rented units to Crow and his traveling companion since their arrival in Italy.

In their guest review comments, the most recent of which were posted in September, all four hosts indicated that they believed Father Crow and the young

woman were a "couple."

However, Hernandez told OSV News in a Sept. 28 text message that the woman's family "are unsure where she is and ... are still very concerned for her safety."

Previously, Hernandez advised OSV News that the young woman's family had lost regular contact with their daughter, since her mobile phone was no longer in her possession.

OSV News has attempted to contact Crow directly via his last known mobile number, but calls were declined and WhatsApp messages were left unread. According to status updates from WhatsApp, the priest has apparently blocked the number used by OSV News to reach him.

Rodi said in his Sept. 29 message that "like many of you, I was confused and appalled and hungry for information and explanation" about Crow's sudden disappearance.

"I wanted to talk with you about this as your archbishop, but I was hampered in my ability to do so by both a lack of information to give and an active criminal investigation," he said. "I wanted to be able to provide facts, not speculation, and I did not want to do anything that might interfere with or impede the District Attorney or the Mobile County Sheriff's Office's ability to get to the bottom of what occurred and prosecute, if appropriate."

At present, "the core facts" of the case "have not changed," said Rodi. "To my knowledge, law enforcement continues to investigate this matter."

However, law enforcement and Hernandez have admitted that efforts to address the numerous questions raised by the case have been hampered by a lack of information.

The Mobile County Sheriff's Office told OSV News that it had not yet found "anything criminal thus far after reviewing" evidence in the case, which "will be closed out" if information from "one more piece of evidence" offers "nothing revealing."

However, the county's district attorney told OSV News it continues to pursue the case, and called for those with any knowledge of the matter to come forward.

"We appreciate the parents, students and other members of the community who have come forward to assist with our investigation," Mobile County District Attorney

Keith Blackwood told OSV News. "There are still remaining witnesses, including some that are employees of the archdiocese and/or McGill-Toolen, with whom we have had difficulty speaking. We encourage continued cooperation, as every piece of information could be valuable in painting a more complete picture."