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)

Gina Christian

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The Archdiocese of Mobile said it is "relieved" that a priest who fled his pastoral assignment this summer has returned to the U.S., as the Mobile County District Attorney’s Office announced its investigation into the priest has been closed with no charges filed.

Fr. Alex Crow, who abruptly left Corpus Christi Parish in Mobile, Alabama, at the end of July to travel to Italy with a June 2023 graduate of McGill-Toolen Catholic High School, "may have returned home to the Mobile area" according to "numerous individuals and media reports," said the archdiocese in a Nov. 6 statement.

Mobile County District Attorney Keith Blackwood confirmed the soon-to-be-laicized priest was back in the U.S., saying in a Nov. 6 statement that "when the young lady and Priest (sic) returned, we subpoenaed the young lady to meet with our office to determine what had occurred, and whether there was any criminal action."

The district attorney's office led one of four inquiries into the unexpected departure of Crow and the young woman, with the Mobile County Sheriff's Office, the young woman's family and the Archdiocese of Mobile each launching their own investigations into the matter.

In his statement, Blackwood said that while Crow and the young woman were abroad, his office "did what it could by interviewing over 30 witnesses and reviewing thousands of pages of documents provided by the Archdiocese, as well as documents recovered from our independent investigation."

"We spoke to many concerned citizens in the community," he said.

Blackwood said that the young woman -- who has remained unnamed in media reports at the request of her family -- "appeared in seemingly good health and said that she is safe."

"However, she brought an attorney with her to the meeting, and together they declined to answer any questions about the circumstances surrounding her July disappearance, or indeed any other questions," said Blackwood. "Without being able to speak with the young lady about these events, we do not have sufficient admissible evidence to charge a crime at this time. Therefore, this investigation is currently closed."

He added that "as there are no criminal charges at this time, I will not answer any questions about a private relationship between two now-adults." The archdiocesan statement -- which referred to the priest by his given name, without the title "Father" -- noted that he had not contacted the archdiocese, which stressed that Crow "has been removed from ministry and his priestly faculties are suspended.

"Therefore, Crow is not to exercise any ministry as a priest, or present himself as a priest," said the statement. "He is not allowed to celebrate Mass, visit school grounds, or lead any church ministries. If anyone is aware of Crow doing so, they are encouraged to contact the Archdiocese immediately at 251-434-1587."

Attorney Christine Hernandez, who represents the young woman's family, told local media that Crow and the young woman are currently staying with his father, attorney Duncan Crow. Hernandez also said the young woman is being represented by attorney Buzz Jordan, and that "she's not allowed to go anywhere without a lawyer or Alex."

From their departure until at least September, Crow and the young woman -- who has remained unnamed in the press at the request of her family -- stayed in at least four Airbnb properties in San Gimignano, a picturesque medieval town near Florence, Italy, that is popular with tourists.

While the young woman was believed to be 18 at the time of travel, her family has repeatedly expressed grave concerns that their daughter had been groomed by the 30-year-old Crow, who attended the school from 2007-2011 and provided pastoral ministry to students -- although school officials have denied he was formally employed or had ever chaperoned school trips or retreats.

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.

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He left behind a letter to the Archdiocese of Mobile stating he had no intention of returning to the U.S.

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 that 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.

Archbishop Thomas J. 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 that 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.

However, "I did receive complaints by some about [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.

In its Nov. 6 statement, the archdiocese described Crow's behavior as "scandalous," but admitted "the Archdiocese does not have any information to indicate that Crow has committed any crime.

"To the extent law enforcement is continuing to investigate the circumstances surrounding Crow's behavior, the Archdiocese will continue to cooperate fully," said the statement, adding "Crow's sudden departure created scandal, hurt and confusion within the Archdiocese. We continue to pray for God's grace to bring healing to this situation for everyone."

OSV News has made numerous attempts to reach Crow directly at his last known telephone number, but calls have been declined and messages have gone unanswered, with OSV News phone numbers apparently blocked.

OSV News is awaiting requested comments from Hernandez, Jordan, the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office and Duncan Crow.