News

A white man with a swoopy brown haircut wears a clerical collar and stares at the camera

Alex Crow, former parochial vicar at Corpus Christi Parish in Mobile, Ala., is pictured in an undated photo. The Archdiocese of Mobile revealed Jan. 5 that Pope Francis finalized the decision to laicize Crow, who abruptly left the Mobile parish at the end of July to travel to Italy with a June 2023 graduate of McGill-Toolen Catholic High School. (OSV News photo/courtesy Archdiocese of Mobile)

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January 8, 2024

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An Alabama Catholic priest has now been fully returned to the lay state months after he fled the country with a recent Catholic high school graduate whose parents expressed concern she had been groomed by the cleric while she was still a minor.

The Archdiocese of Mobile announced in a Jan. 5 statement that it had "received notice that the laicization of Alex Crow is complete, effective immediately.

"Mr. Crow once served as a priest in the Archdiocese, but is no longer a member of the clergy, confirmed in a letter by our Holy Father, Pope Francis," said the statement.

The archdiocese said that "Crow initiated the process for his own laicization" before the end of a six-month waiting period required by canon law for bishops who wish to directly initiate a priest's laicization. The archdiocese noted that a priest can request laicization at any time.

"It has now been granted. Crow is no longer a member of the clergy, nor has any of the privileges or responsibilities of the priesthood," said the archdiocese in its statement. "This decision of Pope Francis is final. There is no appeal."

On Nov. 20, the former priest civilly married 18-year-old Taylor Victoria Harrison, a June 2023 graduate of McGill-Toolen Catholic High School with whom he had traveled to Italy in July 2023 after abruptly leaving his assignment as a parochial vicar at Corpus Christi Parish in Mobile, Alabama.

Crow, 30, was ordained a priest just two years, and was known to speak frequently on the subject of demons and exorcism -- an area he studied during his seminary formation.

According to the marriage certificate, Harrison turned 18 in June.

Crow and Harrison filed a notarized Alabama marriage certificate with the Mobile County, Alabama, probate court Nov. 20, having returned to the U.S. after staying in several Airbnb properties in San Gimignano, a picturesque medieval town near Florence, Italy, that is popular with tourists.

Mobile Archbishop Thomas J. Rodi had suspended Crow's priestly faculties in late July, and reiterated in a subsequent statement that Crow could no longer minister, present himself or dress as a priest.

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In addition, the archdiocese had notified civil authorities of Crow's departure out of what it called in various statements issued since July 2023 "an abundance of caution."

While the young woman was 18 at the time of travel, her family repeatedly expressed grave concerns 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.

Four investigations were launched into the departure of Crow and the young woman, with the Mobile County Sheriff's Office, the Mobile County District Attorney, the archdiocese and the young woman's family, represented by attorney Christine Hernandez, all seeking to verify whether Crow had groomed the young woman. Both the sheriff's office and the district attorney closed the investigations with no charges, citing a lack of admissible evidence despite extensive interviews with possible witnesses.

"Despite the lack of criminal charges, the Archbishop shared in August that he saw no way back to the priesthood for Crow, considering his scandalous behavior," said the archdiocese in its Jan. 5 statement.

In a Valentine Day's letter written prior to the departure, when Harrison was 17, Crow had described himself to the minor (at the time) as "married" to her.

"I love you, and I thank Jesus for you every day. You have made my life both astronomically more complicated and incredibly better at the same time. You are his gift to me," Crow wrote in the letter, which was released by the Mobile County Sheriff's Office. "Now, we are in love and we are married! I've never been in love before (and I've never been married, obviously!), and I've never felt any of the feelings I have for you for anyone ever in my entire life. I promise that I will love you the absolute best I can, every single day."

The handwritten letter indicated that the priest planned for he and Harrison to be in Italy together "with our family" and have "many wonderful and normal Valentine's Days."

OSV News is awaiting responses to its requests for comment by Crow and Hernandez.

The archdiocese said in its statement that Rodi was grateful for Francis' decision, "which was desired by all parties."

"I pray that this decision is one more way in which we can all move toward peace after these unsettling events," said Rodi in the statement. "I continue to pray for God's grace to bring healing for all."