

## HOW SOME ACCUSED TEACHERS USE LOOPHOLE

# Panel's reviews called too slow

By Christina Hoag  
 The Associated Press.

Months after the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing was notified of a Wilmington elementary school teacher suspected of molesting at least a dozen students and a principal who failed to report him to authorities, the agency has not taken action on the cases.

Both Los Angeles Unified educators retired soon after the Los Angeles Police Department started investigating the allegations in March. However, the commission's time lag in resolving the cases, which could include revoking the person's teaching credential, underscores how teachers accused of grievous misconduct can take advantage of a loophole and simply move on to another district.

Although districts routinely check teaching applicants' credentials, the record may not show if complaints are pending and applicants can appear as clear. By the time the commission takes action, the teachers are already employed and their credential may not be checked again for years.

Experts said studies show pedophile teachers work at, on average, three schools before they are caught.

"This is one more example of why we have to change things," said Jolie Logan, chief executive of Darkness to Light, a nonprofit that works to prevent child sex abuse.

Credentialing commission spokeswoman Erin Sullivan said she could not comment on specific cases. She noted that, under state law, the commission proceeds with cases after prosecutors file charges against a teacher, although it does have some latitude to take action sooner.

In the case of Robert Pimentel, a former teacher at Wilmington's George de la Torre Jr. Elementary School who was arrested Wednesday on charges of molesting 12 students, the police investigation took 10 months. Pimentel's record shows that his teaching credential expired last August.

The school district also reported former Principal Irene Hinojosa to the commission for failing to inform police of two complaints in 2002 and 2008

about Pimentel's alleged touching of female students to law enforcement, as required under the law. Her credential remains valid.

District Superintendent John Deasy said it was frustrating that disciplinary action isn't taken faster in cases involving sexual abuse of children.

The district came under fire last year for failing to report the case of former teacher Mark Berndt, who has pleaded not guilty to 23 counts of lewd acts on students that involved feeding them semen-laced cookies. Administrators have now instituted a case-tracking system and two layers of review so all cases are immediately reported to the licensing commission. Deasy said that was the case with Pimentel and Hinojosa.

After the Berndt case, the district combed through its files and flooded the commission with an additional 591 teacher misconduct cases. The commission said nearly half of those cases did not have to be reported.

The credentialing commission, which is charged with awarding teaching certificates and disciplining teachers, has been criticized in the past for case pileups. In 2011, a legislative audit found the commission had a backlog of 12,600 cases. The commission has since cleared the backlog and instituted new systems to expedite cases.



# Arrestan a maestro por abuso sexual

*Jason León fue acusado por tres alumnas de una escuela en Tarzana*

## SERVICIOS DE LA OPINIÓN

Un maestro de escuela intermedia de Los Ángeles ha sido arrestado y acusado de abusar de tres alumnas adolescentes.

El Procurador de la Ciudad de Los Ángeles Carmen Trutanich dijo que Jason León enfrenta cargos múltiples por abusar y causar daño físico a estudiantes de la escuela Gaspar de Portola, en Tarzana.

Según la investigación, el 15 de junio de 2012 una estudiante de 13 años reportó que León la había tocado inapropiadamente. Tres días después otra niña de 13 años hizo una denuncia similar y una tercera joven acusó al profesor de haber abusado de ella numerosas veces en 2010, cuando tenía 14 años.

Cuatro días después detectivos de la Unidad de Niños Ex-

plotados Sexualmente (SECU, por su sigla en inglés), de la División Juvenil del Departamento de Policía de Los Ángeles (LAUSD), iniciaron la investigación que concluyó en el arresto del profesor, ayer.

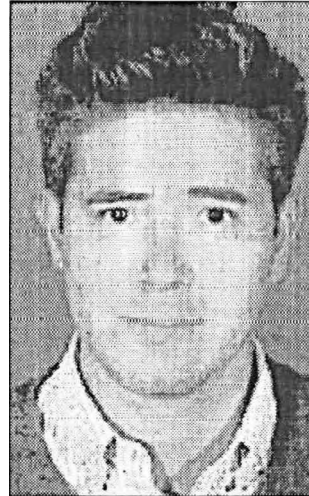
Oficiales de LAUSD dijeron que a León se le removió del plantel escolar cuando surgieron las acusaciones y que estuvo residiendo en un local no escolar, lejos de estudiantes, este año.

A León se le estableció una fianza de 35.000 dólares y, según anunció ayer la Policía de Los Ángeles en un comunicado, durante la investigación los detectives de SECU y las autoridades escolares trabajaron conjuntamente para asegurarse de que el maestro investigado no estuviera en contacto con estudiantes.

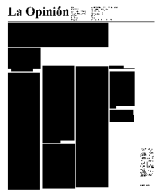
El caso de León se suma a más de una docena de investigaciones contra maestros de LAUSD por denuncias de abuso sexual contra estudiantes, en uno de los cuales Mark Berndt, de 61 años —exprofe-

sor de una escuela de mayoría de alumnos hispanos— está acusado de 23 casos de abuso con una fianza de 23 millones de dólares.

En septiembre, Paul Chapel III, de 51 años y ex profesor de la Escuela Elemental Telfair de Pacoima, fue sentenciado a 25 años de cárcel por abusar sexualmente de 13 estudiantes.



**Jason León en foto suministrada sin fecha.** (Foto: LAPD)



# Caso de sacerdotes alcanza a LAUSD

*Arquidiócesis dice que exempleados fueron contratados por el Distrito*

**ESMERALDA FABIÁN-ROMERO**  
 esmeralda.fabian@laopinion.com

No solo los casos de abuso de menores en las escuelas Miraflores, Telfair o George de la Torre Jr., entre otras, han empuñado al Distrito Escolar Unificado de Los Ángeles (LAUSD), ahora a estos se les suma el hecho de que de acuerdo con la Arquidiócesis de Los Ángeles, el distrito contrató a por lo menos tres individuos de quienes advirtió, habían sido acusados de presunto abuso sexual a menores.

Además del sacerdote Joseph Piña, quien confesó él mismo haber sostenido una relación sexual con una menor hace más de 30 años, y laboró en la división de instalaciones del LAUSD por 9 años, la máxima institución católica del condado de Los Ángeles reveló el lunes documentos en los que se menciona a otros dos individuos, Renato López y José Riley.

En el documento, con fecha del 8 de mayo del 2008, Margaret Graf, consejera legal de la Arquidiócesis de Los Ángeles advirtió al consejero legal del LAUSD, Kevin Reed, de una demanda civil en contra de López. En esta se especifica que una menor fue "víctima de explotación y abuso sexual a un menor de edad" por López, quien fuera entrenador de deportes en el colegio Sacred Heart. Los he-

chos presuntamente ocurrieron en el otoño del 2005.

Aún cuando la Arquidiócesis supuestamente envió copias de dicha demanda al LAUSD, un portavoz del distrito escolar confirmó que éste fue contratado en el distrito escolar para trabajar durante cuatro años como asistente de entrenador de deportes en mayo del 2008, en la preparatoria Woodrow Wilson High School en El Sereno.

La carta enviada al LAUSD advertía sobre López. "Nos hemos enterado que el señor López estaría trabajando en el LAUSD. Quisiera hacerle notar la demanda civil de una ex estudiante de una de las escuelas de la Arquidiócesis... que fue referida al LAPD. En reseña, López negó las acusaciones y renunció en marzo del **[CURA, Pág. 2A]**

En el caso de Riley, el portavoz del distrito escolar también pudo confirmar que "trabajó como maestro en Berendo, y fue retirado del salón de clase y del plantel en 2008, una vez que nos enteramos de las acusaciones" que pesaban en su contra. El funcionario del LAUSD indicó que Riley desde entonces se encuentra bajo supervisión administrativa. Es decir, el maestro ha sido retirado del plantel escolar pero continua en investigación por

conducta inapropiada, con goce de sueldo.

En un documento separado que la Arquidiócesis afirma envió por fax en marzo del 2008 al consejero legal del LAUSD, Reed, advirtió también sobre el mal comportamiento de Riley. De lo cual la Arquidiócesis se enteró por medio de uno de sus sacerdotes a quien un alumno y supuesta víctima de Riley le confesara que "fue abusada por José Riley cuando tenía 14 años", dice la carta enviada a unidad de menores abusados sexualmente del Departamento de Policía de Los Ángeles (LAPD).

Esta carta fue enviada al LAUSD y "nunca se recibió respuesta del distrito, ni llamadas o consulta al respecto", sostuvo una portavoz de la Arquidiócesis de Los Ángeles.

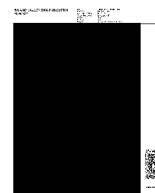
En la misiva Graf escribió, "ya que el presunto predador es aparentemente ahora un empleado del LAUSD, me he tomado la libertad de enviar esta carta. He pedido a (la víctima) que contacte a la directora de Berendo Middle School".

Al respecto del caso de Piña y de otros 121 archivos de sacerdotes acusados, el LAPD informó que "revisará todos y cada uno de esos expedientes, incluyendo los casos abiertos, cerrados o pendientes.

**EN CONTEXTO**

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**CARTA ENVIADA AL LAUSD POR MARGARET GRAF, CONSEJERA LEGAL DE LA ARQUIDIÓCESIS DE LOS ÁNGELES CON FECHA DEL 8 DE MAYO DEL 2008.**



ABUSIVE CLERICS

# Former priests could be next door

**CASES:** Without a tracking system, molestation suspects could be a danger to children.

By Barbara Jones Staff Writer

Half of them are dead, a handful are in prison, a few have continued in the ministry.

And the rest of the former priests — those accused in Los Angeles Archdiocese files of sexually abusing altar boys, parishioners' kids and schoolchildren — could be just about anywhere.

Because of efforts by Cardinal Roger Mahony and his top aides to shield scores of suspect priests from prosecution, many have been free to leave the church and start new lives without anyone else knowing about their past.

Although the priests are aging — the youngest is nearing 60, and most are in their 70s and 80s — victims and their advocates worry about the inability of the system to track these alleged abusers and to notify the public.

"The frightening prospect is that the gentle man next door, who is so friendly and engaging with children, might well turn out to be somebody who has a sickness and disease that makes him a danger to children," said attorney Raymond Boucher, who helped secure a \$660 million settlement in 2007 against the archdiocese in the sex-abuse scandal.

"They are predators in every sense of the word. They know just how to seek out those children who are likely to be sucked in by their charisma and magnetism. Their warm and engaging personalities is part of who they are."

Esther Hatfield Miller knows what it's like to be "groomed" by a charismatic priest. As a cheerleader at Reseda High, she was one of the many teenage girls who say they were lured into relationships with Michael Nocita, a now-defrocked priest who at the time was assigned to St.

Bridget of Sweden church in Van Nuys.

"This is one of the things that is concerning to me — pedophiles don't look like 'stranger danger,'" said Miller, now 54, who said she's spent years in therapy trying to deal with the trauma of Nocita's abuse.

"They have this nuance about them that doesn't raise awareness that this guy is dangerous. Their coercion is very subtle."

In fact, the priests' ability to connect with parishioners — adults and kids alike — was mentioned in several of the extensive files, which have been reviewed by a team of Los Angeles News Group reporters and editors.

The documents released under court order on Jan. 31 also detail horrific allegations of molestation, and how church leaders transferred abusive priests from parish to parish in order to shield them from police.

Because the statute of limitations had expired by the time the molestation was reported, the priests were never prosecuted for crimes that might have landed them on a sex-offender registry and under the eye of authorities.

"The priests got a 'get out of jail free' card from the church," Boucher said. "It was something that was done with knowledge and intent."

As part of his legal battle to win unrestricted access to archdiocese files, Boucher compiled an extensive database in 2011 showing the locations of priests suspected of sex abuse.

By showing that disgraced priests were living near schools, across from parks or close to libraries, Boucher hoped to persuade a judge to include the names of the accused when the documents were released.

The first judge refused, saying the names should be blacked out. That decision was overturned by another judge who said the public deserved to know how church leaders had handled molesting priests.

While websites like bisho-paccountability.org have

tracked the legal cases against the priests, Boucher's database is believed to be the only one that shows the whereabouts of those accused of misconduct.

"It was a pretty monumental task," Boucher said. "We used last-known addresses, Internet researchers, our own investigators. Then we verified the location. And if we found out it wasn't accurate, it was figuring out where they went."

Using Boucher's information, the "Report to the People of God" released by the archdiocese in 2004 and its own research, the Los Angeles News Group was able to break down the files released last week. They show:

- Of the 122 priests whose files were released by the archdiocese, 62 are reported to have died. They include Father Ted Llanos, 50, who killed himself in 1997 while facing a lawsuit accusing him of molesting altar boys over a 20-year period.

- Twenty-three have been traced to neighborhoods in Los Angeles, Ventura, Orange and San Bernardino counties. Five others are in Central and Northern California.

- Seventeen couldn't be located at all, although two may have fled to Mexico, one is believed to be in Spain and another in Colombia.

- Eleven were convicted of sex crimes or took a plea deal for a reduced sentence. Four of them are currently behind bars.

- Two continue in their ministry — Father Joseph Alzugaray is assigned to St. Apollinaris Catholic Church in Napa; and Father Edward Casey is listed as a "resident" at St. Pius X Church in Broomall, Pa.

- Two other priests — Sean Cronin and David Granadino — are listed in the archdiocese directory as being on administrative leave.

- Ex-priest George Miller,

on parole for sex abuse, lives next door to Carl Sutphin, who was defrocked after being accused of molesting 18 boys, at a trailer park in Oxnard.

- Some accused molesters got jobs in positions of trust and authority after leaving the church.

Donald Farmer, who served at churches in Glendale and Thousand Oaks, left the priesthood and became a family therapist in Fresno. He was accused in 2003 of molesting four children after befriending their parents. He denied the allegations and the charges were eventually dropped.

Joseph Pina — an ex-priest accused of having relationships with young girls — worked for more than a decade as a community liaison for Los Angeles Unified ~~SCHOOL DISTRICT~~. The school district terminated him when the files were released and officials became aware of his background.

Nocita, the defrocked priest accused of relationships with numerous teenage girls, worked as a color commentator for a local news station during Pope John Paul II's visit in 1987 and was later hired as executive director of the youth center in La Cañada Flintridge.

He recently left his job in human resources at an abalone farming company and is reportedly living in Redondo Beach, but there was no phone listing for him.

A listing also was unavailable for Miller. Sutphin did not return calls for comment.

Victims advocate David Clohessy said the Catholic Church needs to do more to ensure that the community remains safe from priests accused of wrongdoing — even if the abuse occurred decades earlier.

He said the church should cut off financial support to priests who have retired or been put on leave under the

shadow of an abuse allegation. And if an active priest is suspected of abuse, Clohessy wants officials to put him in a secured treatment facility or turn his file over to authorities.

“These predators live almost completely unsupervised among unsuspecting friends, neighbors and co-workers, said Clohessy, the president of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests. “It’s an invitation to disaster.”

Archdiocese attorney J. Michael Hennigan said the church has no way to track its former priests, adding that “they are like any other citizen” once they leave the church.

He also said the archdiocese is cooperating with law enforcement agencies that are reviewing the old files and has offered “enthusiastic assistance” in prosecuting clergy suspected of abuse.