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Fr. Alex Crow, former parochial vicar at Corpus Christi Parish in Mobile, Ala., is pictured in an undated photo. The priest, disgraced after abandoning his parish to travel to Italy with an 18-year-old woman, described himself as "married" in a Valentine's Day letter he wrote to the recent high school graduate. (OSV News photo/courtesy Archdiocese of Mobile)

by Associated Press

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Mobile, Ala. — August 23, 2023

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A sheriff said August 22 that authorities have subpoenaed phone records of an Alabama priest and an 18-year-old woman — who fled to Europe together — to see if there is evidence of an illegal relationship when she was a student.

Alex Crow, a Catholic priest in south Alabama, left the country in late July with an 18-year-old woman who is a recent graduate of McGill-Toolen High School, authorities in south Alabama said. Crow did not teach at the school but visited theology classes and heard confession there, news outlets reported.

"We want to get the truth. If there has been a crime, we want to pursue it," Mobile County Sheriff Paul Burch told The Associated Press. The sheriff said they are seeking text messages and other information contained in the phones.

Alabama law prohibits sexual contact between a school employee and a student 19 or younger. "As long as you are 19 or younger, it's a crime if you are a student and the other party is some — I guess loose word — employee. That could include volunteer, coach, counselor, that kind of thing," Burch said.

The Mobile County Sheriff's Office last week released a copy of a letter, purportedly written to the girl on Valentine's Day in which he refers to himself as "Your Valentine and Husband!"

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"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 letter released by the sheriff's office read.

The archbishop for the region said August 21 that the church is continuing to cooperate with the criminal investigation.

Archbishop Thomas J. Rodi said in a video posted on Facebook on August 21 that church officials alerted the local district attorney as soon as they learned what happened.

"I join with you who are concerned, sad, angry about the behavior of Alex Crow," Rodi said in the video message. He said the archdiocese, "continues to fully cooperate with investigators."

Rodi said Crow was immediately directed to cease acting as a priest and "he could not continue to tell people he's a priest." The archdiocese is also pursuing Crow's dismissal from the priesthood.