

LOCAL NEWS

Encino Catholic priest under investigation for alleged 'inappropriate contact' with underage girl

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The Archdiocese of Los Angeles has placed the pastor, Father Juan Cano, on administrative leave as a result of reports of "inappropriate contact" by him involving "several females" in the Our Lady of Grace parish, including a minor, according to a statement by the Archdiocese. (Photo courtesy Our Lady of Grace Church via Instagram)

The Los Angeles Police Department is investigating an allegation of child annoyance involving an associate pastor at Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church in Encino, authorities said Monday.

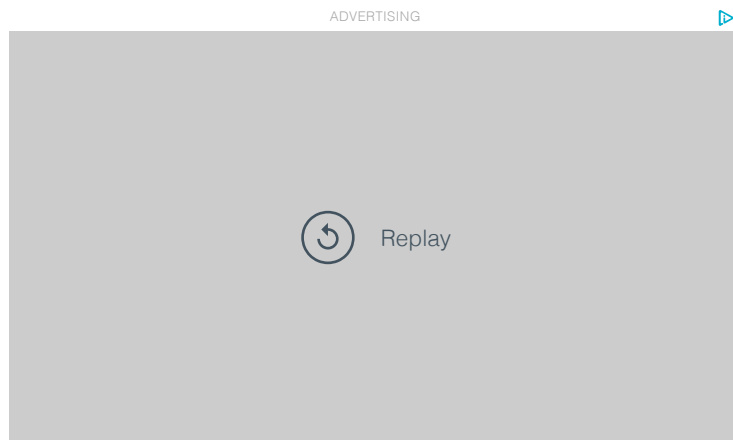
The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles removed the priest, Father Juan Cano, from ministry last week and placed him on administrative leave as a result of reports of “inappropriate contact” by him involving “several females” in the parish — including one who is currently a minor — according to a statement by the Archdiocese.

“It’s an ongoing investigation pending review by the City Attorney,” LAPD Officer Drake Madison said of the child annoyance allegation.

Madison could not provide more information about the crime report.

The City Attorney’s office is responsible for prosecuting misdemeanor crimes in the city of Los Angeles.

Cano, who had served as associate pastor at Our Lady of Grace since July 2015, could not be reached for comment Monday.



The Archdiocese announced the news at Masses at the church on Saturday evening and on Sunday.

The alleged incidents have been reported to the authorities, with the parish and the Archdiocese “collaborating fully in the investigation,” Archdiocese officials said in a statement.

Cano’s photo and contact information have been removed from [Our Lady of Grace Church’s website](#), though an [archived version](#) of the page shows that he was previously listed as the church’s associate pastor.

“The Archdiocese has a zero tolerance policy for any type of allegation relating to sexual misconduct relating to a child,” Adrian M. Alarcon, the Archdiocese’s director of media relations, said Monday.

Anyone with information or concerns about Cano is urged to contact LAPD Detective Rose Gaeta at 213-486-0580 or the Archdiocesan Office of Victims Assistance Ministry at 213-637-7650, the Archdiocese stated.

The Archdiocese noted that it has established abuse prevention programs for children and adults at all of its parishes and schools “to help ensure the safety and well-being of all in our communities.”

But Joelle Casteix, volunteer western regional leader of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), said the Archdiocese should be more transparent by posting their statement on Our Lady of Grace’s website as well as the site for St. James Catholic Church in Redondo Beach, where Cano previously served as a deacon. They also should include the message in the weekly parish bulletins, she said.

“If you were a victim of abuse of power or sexual assault, you’re not going to be sitting in Mass,” Casteix said. “They’re doing the least amount possible (to inform parishioners).”

Alarcon said such announcements are usually given at Masses or put in the bulletins — not typically both — and they look to the guidelines in their national charter.



Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church in Encino, photographed Monday, Jan. 29, 2018. (Photo by Dean Musgrove, Los Angeles Daily News/SCNG)

Cano, who is in his mid-30s and is originally from Chihuahua, Mexico, was ordained as a priest in 2015. His first parish assignment was at Our Lady of Grace, according to a [Facebook post](#) from the vocations office of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

He said in an interview with Angelus News, a publication of the Tidings Corp. and the Archdiocese, that he was born with a tumor in his head which had no cure. His family prayed for a miracle and he “grew in the faith” via his family’s involvement in the Church.

Cano said in that interview that he looked forward to “being a symbol of hope, mercy, joy and love to those whom I will be walking with and serving as a priest.”

We will have more on this developing story as updates become available.

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Brenda Gazzar

Brenda Gazzar is a multilingual multimedia reporter who has worked for a variety of news outlets in California and in the Middle East since 2000. She has covered a range of issues, including breaking news, immigration, law and order, race, religion and gender issues, politics, human interest stories and education. Besides the Los Angeles Daily News and its sister papers, her work has been published by Reuters, the Denver Post, Ms. Magazine, the Jerusalem Post, USA Today, the Christian Science Monitor, the Los Angeles Jewish Journal, The Cairo Times and others. Brenda speaks Spanish, Hebrew and intermediate Arabic and is the recipient of national, state and regional awards, including a National Headliners Award and one from the Associated Press News Executives' Council. She holds a dual master's degree in Communications/Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Texas at Austin.

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