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Father Cristobal Garcia: Priest fled to the Philippines and rose in the Church

By Dana Bartholomew, Staff Writer

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[Los Angeles Archdiocese kept sexual abuse in the shadows](#) » **Father Cristobal Garcia**

Father Vincent Serpa, pastor of St. Dominic Catholic Church in Eagle Rock, knew he had a problem with Father Cristobal Garcia.

He just didn't know how big.

"A family came to him to report that the associate, Father Cristobal Garcia, was involved in giving cocaine to minors in the parish," said then-Monsignor Thomas Curry, vicar of clergy for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, in a 1988 confidential memo to then-Archbishop Roger M. Mahony, three years after the incident.

"To see if he could find any evidence of this, Father Serpa went into Garcia's room while he was celebrating Mass and found a seventeen-year-old boy in his bed."

The St. Dominic priest, expelled "for serious cause" from the parish in 1985, according to church accounts, was drummed out of the Dominican Order.

He was also subject to a civil lawsuit by an altar boy accusing him and a fellow priest of molesting him for three years in the early 1980s while supplying him with illegal drugs. The church and archdiocese were also named.

Garcia, whose dalliances with and providing drugs to boys were reported to police, was never charged for any crime. But instead of banishment to

religious purgatory, he was promoted into the church's highest ranks.

Garcia fled to his native Philippines, promising to seek therapy. The scion of one of that nation's wealthiest families was then welcomed into the local archdiocese, where he rose to monsignor rank.

There he founded a monastic religious society whose young male recruits called him "their supreme motivator," according to a Dallas Morning News expose.

And where, in the crucible of Asian Catholicism, he became a prominent face of his church, overseeing the worship practices of nearly 4 million believers.

"Father Cristobal agreed to go to therapy but on condition he could do so in his native Philippines," said the Curry memo, contained in Los Angeles Archdiocese personnel files released last week. "His family is very wealthy and influential, and his father volunteered to pay the expenses involved.

"Father Garcia returned to the Philippines, but there is no record of treatment. The Archbishop of Cebu incardinated him into his Archdiocese, and Father Garcia is operating there."

Now decades after his alleged sexual and drug crimes in Eagle Rock, history may be catching up.

Last fall, Garcia was implicated in a National Geographic article of being involved in the illegal — and insatiable — ivory trade to the Philippines. The magazine quoted the senior priest, one of the nation's best known ivory collectors, telling an American reporter how to smuggle illegal elephant ivory figurines into the U.S.

"Wrap it in old, stinky underwear and pour ketchup on it, so it looks (crappy) with blood," he was quoted saying. "This is how it is done."

The Philippine National Bureau of Investigation and the country's wildlife protection agency are investigating.

In a lawsuit against Garcia, Pasadena resident Paul Corral alleged that Garcia and a Brother Juan Macias had for three years molested him, on occasion holding him against his will while forcing him to submit to sexual intercourse, according to a complaint released by the archdiocese. Corral shared his story with the Dallas Morning News, which documented more than 200 cases in which Catholic clergymen had gone abroad and stayed in ministry.

Eight years ago, Garcia told the Dallas Morning News he'd had sex with altar boys and given them drugs — but only over the threat of blackmail.

One of them "not only seduced me, he also raped me," Garcia said in a 2005 interview.

He acknowledged having sex with Corral and another Los Angeles altar boy who were in their early teens. The boys, he said, obtained sex, cocaine, marijuana and money from him by threatening to accuse him of abuse.

"Who would believe me?" said Monsignor Garcia, who was then in his early to mid-50s. "What can a foreigner do?"

The global publicity about sex with boys and ivory smuggling highlighted by National Geographic didn't escape notice in Rome.

Last September, the Vatican stripped the monsignor of all ministerial duties in the Archdiocese of Cebu while the Holy See investigates the child abuse case.

The Vatican investigation came 27 years after Garcia's "possible pedophilic activity" was noted in confidential files held by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, along with a recommendation that it be turned over for investigation.

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