

Advocate decries accused's Vatican tour

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An advocate for battered women is outraged that a Quincy developer is getting a private guided tour of the Vatican while facing multiple counts of child rape.

"It's ironic in many ways that this is where he is going when he's facing these charges, given the church's continuing struggle in dealing honestly and proactively with the victims of clergy abuse in the U.S. and around the world," said Toni Troop, executive director of Jane Doe Inc. "We long for the day when the response from the Vatican is, 'He is not welcome on a private tour.'"

William O'Connell, 72, a wealthy Quincy real estate mogul who is on pretrial probation as he awaits trial on four counts of child rape, two counts of unnatural acts with a child and trafficking cocaine, was granted a weeklong pass to visit the Holy See with his brother and stay at the church-owned Columbus Hotel, according to court documents.

"The purpose of this trip is to have a religious experience by having many private guided tours of the Vatican in order to more thoroughly understand the history of the Roman Catholic Church," read the paperwork filed by O'Connell's lawyer, Stephen Delinsky.

Boston archdiocese spokesman Terry Donilon said the archdiocese was not involved in O'Connell's trip and did not play a role in its planning.

The motion granting O'Connell permission to take his European vacation was allowed with the consent of prosecutors, according to Norfolk Superior Court Judge Kenneth Fishman's ruling. Norfolk District Attorney Michael Morrissey's office hired special prosecutor Andrew Berman to handle the case because of conflicts. Morrissey's office referred calls to Berman, who did not return repeated calls for comment yesterday.