Even before he was ordained a Catholic priest, the Rev. Ronald Lange went to Ghana in 1968 to do missionary work.

In a profile by a community newspaper years later, Lange spoke of his commitment to learning about Ghana while teaching at schools there and leading a parish with more than a dozen worship sites.
“The people are just so happy to see you,” Lange, a member of the Society of the Divine Word’s Chicago province, based near Northbrook, was quoted as saying. “You don’t even have to be a good priest.”

And he wasn’t, as his order now acknowledges.

In his four decades as a Catholic missionary in Ghana, Lange has been credibly accused of sexually abusing children over “multiple years.”

That’s according to his order’s Chicago hub. Facing scrutiny over its predator priests, including one who’s now on trial in East Timor, the order has for the first time revealed the names and past postings of Divine Word clergy who’ve been part of the Chicago province and been deemed by its leaders to have been credibly accused of child sex abuse anywhere in the world.

Lange, 79, is one of two priests on that list who formally remain part of the Chicago province of the Society of the Divine Word, an international religious order that “focuses on missionary work” and since 1875 has “entered lands where people are in need” and shared “God’s love.”
He’s also one of 26 current, former or deceased members the province now says have had substantiated accusations against them of having sexually abused children.

A number of them were sent out into the world to do their missionary work after serving, training or being ordained at the Divine Word’s Chicago province headquarters, called Techny, along Waukegan Road north of Willow Road in the north suburbs.

They have, over the years, been posted to impoverished, often remote parts of the world where police are scarce, support systems for children are often nonexistent and deference to clergy is frequently unquestioned.

Of the 26 order members accused of abusing kids who are included on the new Divine Word list, more than half served in the developing world at some point. Besides Ghana, their postings included: Papua New Guinea, China, Kenya, South Africa, the Philippines, Mexico, Chile and Jamaica.

Notably absent from the list is a defrocked priest named Richard Daschbach, who was ordained at the Divine Word’s sprawling Techny grounds in the 1960s.

For decades, Daschbach has lived in East Timor, a tiny, majority-Catholic nation that once was part of Indonesia. Now 84, Daschbach has run orphanages there and — unbeknownst to the outside world until recent years — systematically sexually assaulted children there. That’s according to authorities who are now prosecuting him for sex crimes, news interviews with victims and victims’ advocates and sources who spoke to the Chicago SunTimes.
The clergy sex abuse scandal in the United States exploded into public view beginning in the 1980s, with allegations of priests having raped children — and, in some cases, bishops having covered up their crimes. There have been waves of such allegations since then, prompting lawsuits and payouts that have left some dioceses struggling financially.

After the horror have come reforms by a church hierarchy in America not known for easily accepting change, aimed at weeding out child molesters from the clerical ranks, dealing more openly with abuse accusations and attempting to promote healing among victims.

Other parts of the developed world, including Europe, also have grappled with similar problems.

But impoverished areas around the world, particularly developing nations, have yet to face and deal with the extent of sexual abuse by clerics — homegrown or sent as missionaries, according to experts who predict this will be the next seismic scandal to face the Catholic church worldwide.

“I think we’ve barely scratched the surface,” Thomas Doyle, a Dominican priest who’s been an advocate for sexual abuse victims since the 1980s, says of the scope of the problem in more remote parts of the world.

Thomas Doyle, a Catholic priest belonging to the Dominican order, shown in 2002 addressing a group of church members demanding reform in the wake of a clergy sex abuse scandal that exploded that year. | AP

Tim Law, a Seattle lawyer who’s president of an international group called Ending Clergy Abuse. | Provided
‘They’re where we were’

One of the reasons clergy sex abuse has continued or remained hidden in developing parts of the world, according to Tim Law, a Seattle lawyer who’s president of an international group called Ending Clergy Abuse, is the “great reverence by the populace for the clergy there,” in parts of Africa, Asia, Latin America.

Also, he and others say, victims often are reluctant to come forward, fearing the power of the clergy in many places.

“They’re where we were” in the United States “40, 50 years ago in terms of mentality,” Law says.

In much of the West, Catholicism has seen members abandoning the faith and even many of the faithful rarely attending Sunday Mass. But it’s rapidly grown in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world.
Many of the Divine Word clergy members credibly accused of molesting kids and included in the new list are not accused of doing so in other countries, despite serving overseas. The accusations against these clerics have been made in the United States.


Since earlier this year, he has been living in East Troy, Wisconsin, where he remains a member of the order’s Chicago province.

**Still priests but banned from ministry**

Lange served in Ghana from 1968 to 1991, was back in the United States from 1991 to 1996, returned to Ghana from 1996 to 2013 and since then has been in Missouri, according to his order. It says he’s been credibly accused of sexual abuse in the west African nation over “multiple” years as well as in 1987 in Iowa.

Though both men remain part of the order, Pool and Lange are now “prohibited from performing public ministry, are not able to wear clerical attire or identify themselves as priests or religious and are not to have any contact with minors,” according to the Society of the Divine Word. “Their conduct is monitored.”

**Those Credibly Accused of Sexually Abusing a Minor**

The list of those who have abused a minor is divided into four parts:

- Current Members
- Members Assigned Outside the Chicago Province
- Deceased Members
- Former Members

**Current Members**

These members of the Chicago Province have been credibly accused of the sexual abuse of a minor. They are prohibited from performing public ministry, are not able to wear clerical attire or identify themselves as priests or religious and are not to have any contact with minors. Their conduct is monitored.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location / Time of Abuse</th>
<th>Assignment Locations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birth: 1942; Ordained: 1971; Current Location: Dittmer MO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born: 1917; Ordained: 1992; Current Location: East Troy WI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another Divine Word priest the order says similarly was being monitored until his death earlier this year was the Rev. Joe Fertal. Accused of repeatedly sexually assaulting a teenager, Fertal had been the subject of a lawsuit in the 1990s that was settled in California.

In 2016, his health failing, Fertal was moved to Techny.

According to the list his order recently issued, Fertal sexually abused children while assigned to:

- Techny in 1968.
- Niles in 1971.
- Corona, California, in 1995.

Fertal was assigned to the Philippines, which is heavily Catholic, from 1960 to 1967 and again from 1972 to 1989, records show.

Citing information from a Divine Word superior, a 2002 California newspaper reported that the church moved Fertal “back to the United States in 1989 amid rumors that he had inappropriate relationships with teenage boys.”

Fertal had two stints at Techny, initially assigned to the north suburban religious complex from 1967 to 1972.

1 priest’s time at Niles parish

The order’s new list doesn’t provide specifics of what Fertal was accused of doing in Niles during that period.

But a man who once studied to be a priest with the order told the Sun-Times that Fertal served for a time during that period and was temporarily living in the rectory at St. John Brebeuf Church in Niles when he made a sexual advance to the man’s brother, then around 10 years old and a student at the parish school.
Fertal would take kids to the movies, according to the former student for the priesthood, speaking on the condition he not be named. He says that, during one excursion, Fertal “put his hand on my brother’s leg to see what his reaction would be.” The boy got up, saying he had to use the restroom, and sat somewhere else when he returned.

Later, “he told my dad,” who called the church’s pastor, telling him: “You need to get Fertal out of Brebeuf immediately,” according to the man. “If you don’t, he’s going to be minus a few teeth.”

The former seminarian says, “And my dad probably would have done it. You know what the front door of Techny looks like? That’s probably where he would have dumped him.”

Fertal was sent back to Techny, the man says.
Asked about his account, the Rev. Quang Duc Dinh, the Chicago province’s leader, says, “I am only aware of one incident in Niles involving one person, and that involved providing alcohol to a minor.”

Unlike the Society of the Divine Word and other male Catholic religious orders, which operate largely independently, St. John Brebeuf operates under the auspices of the Archdiocese of Chicago — the arm of the church for Cook and Lake counties overseen by Cardinal Blase Cupich.

**A jurisdictional divide on revealing abusers**

Dioceses are geographic jurisdictions led by a bishop who answers to the pope. In the United States, though they are not required to do so, most now maintain and have made public their own lists of abusive clergy who have lived or served in their territory.
Fertal, though, isn’t included on the list that Cupich’s office maintains.

It isn’t that Cupich doesn’t know about Fertal. The cardinal has been using his ecclesiastical clout for several years to collect information on predator priests who have lived or served in his territory from the Society of the Divine Word and other orders, the Sun-Times has reported. That information includes their names and details of the accusations against them, according to officials with some of the orders.

But Cupich, who has declined to discuss the matter, has chosen to restrict the list he’s had posted on the archdiocese’s website to abusive diocesan clergy, those who answered directly to him or his predecessors — and to not make public the names or other information he has gathered about members of Catholic religious orders, including the Society of the Divine Word.

Instead, Cupich has left it to the orders themselves — which have their own hierarchies and serve across diocesan lines — to make public any information about their members. And he has called on them to do so.
But not all have, as the Sun-Times has reported in a series of stories in recent months. Some — including the Carmelites, the Viatorians and now the Divine Word order — have. Others — among these the Dominicans, the Augustinians, the Passionists and the Marist Brothers — have not.

All of these Catholic religious orders fall under the pope’s authority. But their semi-autonomous nature and leadership structures have left a gap in terms of revealing abusers in the Chicago area and elsewhere.
Unlike Chicago, some dioceses list abusive order priests

Unlike Cupich, the bishops leading many Catholic dioceses outside Chicago have chosen to make public the names of abusive members of the clergy belonging to religious orders who have lived or served in their regions.

Among them: the Diocese of San Bernardino, California, and the Diocese of Scranton, Pennsylvania. Both include Fertal on their lists of sexual abusers. That’s because he is accused of abusing children in Scranton in 1972 and in Corona, California, in 1995, according to the Society of the Divine Word.

Fertal has been on the lists of those two dioceses since 2018.

That’s the year the latest wave of the church sex abuse scandal hit, with a Pennsylvania grand jury report detailing staggering claims of abuse and coverups by clergy in that state spanning decades and, separately, revelations that former Washington, D.C., Cardinal Theodore McCarrick had sexually abused young adult seminarians and children.

Within the past week, a spokeswoman for Cupich told the Sun-Times’ editorial board that the archdiocese might reverse course and expand “its website list to include certain members of religious orders against whom there are substantiated claims of child sexual abuse.”

Keeping secrets ‘out of respect’ to victims

The Divine Word order — whose worldwide headquarters is in Rome, the heart of Catholicism — describes itself as “the world’s largest Roman Catholic order of priests and brothers who focus on missionary work,” with more than 6,000 missionaries. Of the 10 largest male religious orders, it says it is “the fastest-growing over the past 50 years.
“The Chicago province has the greatest number of Divine Word missionaries in the Western hemisphere,” its territory extending “from Nebraska to Massachusetts and from Canada to the Caribbean,” the group says.

Its new list includes names and the years it says the abuse occurred but leaves out other information — including the number of children who were sexually abused, the year the accusations were leveled and the amount of any legal payouts the order made.

Dinh, the Chicago province’s leader, says that’s “out of respect” to the victims.

“Such lists do not include the name, age, gender or number of victims nor the specific location of the abuse beyond the city, state or country nor the date or manner in which the allegation was received or the amount of any settlement,” Dinh says. “This is done out of respect for victims in order to preserve their anonymity and to avoid causing them further pain and humiliation by people possibly identifying individual victims.

“For the same reason, the Chicago province does not disclose the number of allegations received nor how many of them were credible and how many were false allegations nor the amount of any or all settlements.”

Beyond Lange and Pool, of the 26 clerics on the list of abusive clergy the Society of the Divine Word has made public, 18 are dead, three are former members and three are members now “outside the Chicago province,” according to Dinh.

One of those three outside the Chicago province did missionary work in Jamaica and is now in Papua New Guinea. One has served in the Philippines. The other in Chile.

They no longer should be in active ministry, based on the “recommendation” of the Chicago province.

Whether the order’s leaders in other provinces where these priests now live have acknowledged or agreed to the Chicago province’s recommendation isn’t clear.

The Divine Word order also has two other U.S. provinces — one based in California, the other in the South. They, too, have released lists of abusive members.

Their lists include seven Divine Word missionaries not on Techny’s list. Two of the seven served in the developing world.
CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

THE WATCHDOGS

CHURCH’S SEX ABUSE SECRETS

For more than two years, the Archdiocese of Chicago has been demanding details from religious orders on priests accused of abusing kids — but it’s keeping that info to itself.

Robert Herman

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