

## Priest accused of sex crimes faces murder-for-hire count

**Father John M. Fiala was arrested in Dallas on Thursday after he allegedly tried to hire someone to kill a teenage boy he's accused of sexually assaulting.**

By Eva Ruth Moravec

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A Catholic priest charged with sexually assaulting a teenage boy in 2008 in the rural parish where he worked west of San Antonio was rearrested last week in Dallas and charged with trying to hire someone to kill his accuser.

Father [John M. Fiala](#), 52, was in Dallas County Jail on one count of solicitation to commit murder and two counts of aggravated sexual assault of a child, officials said. A judge set bail at \$700,000.

The sexual assault charges were part of indictments handed up last week in Howard County, which brought to six the number of such charges Fiala faces that involve the boy, who was 16 at the time of the alleged offenses.

The [Texas Rangers](#) and [Department of Public Safety](#) troopers arrested Fiala on Thursday after he negotiated a murder arrangement with an undercover officer at his residence in Garland, DPS spokesman [Tom Vinger](#) said. Fiala sought to have his accuser in the sexual assault cases killed, Vinger said in an e-mailed statement.

A DPS investigation began Nov. 11, when a neighbor of Fiala tipped off Edwards County Sheriff [Don Letsinger](#). "I received a call from an unnamed informant who was having problems with the way Fiala was acting," the sheriff said.

The neighbor "had been solicited (to commit the murder) himself, and he didn't want anything to do with that," Letsinger said. Fiala reportedly offered the neighbor \$5,000 to kill the teen, the sheriff said.

"I have to honestly say that I didn't expect this development," he added. "I really was kind of surprised that he would stick his neck out this far and talk to people he didn't even know about having someone murdered."

Attorney [Tom Rhodes](#), who is representing the boy in a lawsuit in Bexar County, said his client is relieved that Fiala is again in custody.

"Fiala had threatened him with physical violence and threatened to kill him before, and he was very afraid of that," Rhodes said. "My client wasn't happy that Fiala was trying to recruit someone to kill him, but he's happy Fiala is in jail now."

In September, the priest was indicted on three counts of aggravated sexual assault of a child and one count of aggravated sexual assault by threat in Edwards County, where Fiala is accused of raping the teen at gunpoint, according to the charges and the lawsuit.

Dallas-based attorney [Rex Gunter](#), listed as Fiala's attorney on Dallas County Jail's database, did not return a phone call seeking comment Monday.

Fiala had been living in Dallas County since he was released from Edwards County Jail after posting a bond Sept. 27, records show. A fugitive task force arrested him in Kansas on the Edwards County charges, and he was extradited to Texas in September.

Rhodes filed the lawsuit last spring over the sexual assault allegations, also naming the archdioceses of San Antonio and Omaha, Neb., and Fiala's religious order, the Robstown-based Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity.

The lawsuit claims all three entities covered up Fiala's record of abuse, which they have denied. Informed of a police investigation into Fiala's relationship with the boy, former San Antonio Archbishop [José Gomez](#) and Fiala's religious order removed the priest from active ministry in October 2008.

In a hearing here Monday, a judge rejected the Omaha archdiocese's argument that Texas was not a proper jurisdiction for the lawsuit, Rhodes said.

The sexual assault charges stem from Fiala's time as administrator of Sacred Heart of Mary in Rocksprings, the county seat of Edwards County. Rocksprings is about 110 miles west of San Antonio. Fiala was working for the Archdiocese of San Antonio but was still a member of the religious order.

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