

# Father Ritter appealing for U.S. agency in India

By Tracy Early  
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — Father Bruce Ritter, who resigned as president of Covenant House following allegations of sexual and financial misconduct, was back on the front page of a New York tabloid Dec. 3 as a result of an appeal he made for a Connecticut agency that works in India.

The *New York Post* printed a picture of the priest with the headline "He's

Back" in huge capital letters. Alongside the photo appeared a report that the priest was "back in the fund-raising business."

Alan J. Ouimet, founder and president of Franciscan Family Apostolate of Guilford, Conn., said in a telephone interview Dec. 4 that Father Ritter was not raising funds from the general public, but only suggested a contribution in a letter to friends.

"I hope you may, by God's grace, feel led to help this beautiful and most

needy and deserving people," Father Ritter wrote in a letter dated Nov. 20. "It would mean a lot to me if you could care about them and help them."

Ouimet said Father Ritter sent letters along with a brochure on the apostolate to about 1,000 people who had written him since his resignation. He said the priest reported on his new status as a priest of an Indian diocese and in a paragraph asked them to consider the agency's \$15-per-month sponsorship program for Indian families.

Father Ritter's request does not violate an agreement he made with the New York State attorney general that he never again serve as a trustee of a charitable agency in the state. He is not prohibited from raising funds for agencies operated by others.

Ouimet said one recipient of the letter apparently reacted negatively and gave it to the *Post*.

The newspaper broke the December 1989 story that Father Ritter was accused of having a sexual relationship with a young man and supporting him with Covenant House funds.

Father Ritter has not talked to reporters or appeared publicly in the New York area since his resignation.

Father Ritter, formerly a Conventual Franciscan, got Vatican permission as

of July 3 to leave his order and become a priest of the Diocese of Alleppey in Kerala, a state on the west coast of India's southern tip.

Father Ritter became acquainted with Alleppey Bishop Peter M. Chennampalil when the prelate visited Covenant House several years ago, but had never been to the diocese until he accompanied Ouimet there last January.

Father Ritter then asked the bishop to take him into his diocese, Ouimet said. "Out of compassion the bishop incardinated him," he said. "He imposed no requirement that Father Ritter come and work there."

In Alleppey, the apostolate aids about 1,000 families and supports a hospital and economic development projects such as fish ponds and poultry farming. Without any direct mail campaign, Ouimet said, the agency raised about \$260,000 last year. It does work in three other Indian dioceses.

The *Post* story said the return address on Father Ritter's letter was Pound Ridge, N.Y., in Westchester County. Ouimet would only say the priest lives in that county and that he visited him occasionally and kept in touch by telephone and fax machine.

## Britain, Ireland to push new talks

DUBLIN, Ireland (CNS) — Britain and Ireland agreed Dec. 4 to push for renewed peace talks on Northern Ireland.

British Prime Minister John Major and Irish leader Charles Haughey also pledged to hold twice-yearly meetings, in an attempt to improve relations between the two nations.

Talks aimed at returning Northern Ireland to local government after 17 years of direct rule from London broke down in July, with Protestant and Catholic politicians divided over a possible power-sharing formula.

After the talks collapsed, a "tit-for-tat" exchange of murders broke out between Republican and Protestant extremists. British authorities put an

extra 2,000 troops on the streets of Northern Ireland to try to stem the violence.

Speaking after his talks with Haughey in Dublin, Major said: "We have reaffirmed the commitment of both governments to do all we can to help with the early launch of fresh talks."

He stressed that the prospect of a British general election — he has to call one by next June — was no stumbling block.

Their pledge to hold summits was a major breakthrough for two countries with a 700-year history of conflict leading up to the Irish Republican Army's present-day guerrilla fight to oust Britain from Northern Ireland.

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