

# **New e-mail scam targets Catholics, church institutions**

CAPE TOWN, South Africa - A new spam scam targeting Catholics and church institutions promises recipients that they are among 100 people worldwide chosen at random to receive \$650,000 from the Catholic Church in Italy "for your own personal, educational and business development."

The grants are supposedly designed "to make a notable change in the standard of living of people all around the universe." Recipients are urged to contact "the church executive secretary"- sometimes named as Sister Abrielle Gallo, at other times a Miss Mary Pepe - to receive "your donation pin number, which you will use in collecting the funds."

No such grant program exists, and the church does not allocate donations randomly or by lottery, as the e-mail suggests.

An almost identical e-mail purports to be from the "eglise catholique en France," the Catholic Church in France.

According to the Web site [www.hoax-slayer.com](http://www.hoax-slayer.com), such communications are "bait used by scammers to trick victims into replying to the e-mail."

"If the scammers receive a reply, they will begin an ongoing correspondence with their potential victim via e-mail, phone or letter. Eventually, the scammers will request that the victim pay various fees, supposedly required to allow the 'grant' to be released or delivered," the Web site says.

"The scammers will insist that these fees cannot be deducted from the grant itself for legal or insurance reasons. Requests for fees will likely continue until the victim realizes that he or she has been duped. The victim may also be tricked into providing a large amount of personal information that could be subsequently used to steal his or her identity," it says.

"While Christian organizations such as the Catholic Church do regularly donate funds to various worthy causes, they DO NOT randomly grant large sums of money to total strangers chosen solely via an e-mail address or the name on a shopping invoice. Any such claim is simply ludicrous," the Web site says.

In a variation of the fraud, collectively known as Nigerian 411 scams, the scammers adopted the names and addresses of real Catholic parishes and signed them with

actual or invented names of priests or bishops. In the case fraudulently involving a Battersea parish in London, a “Rev. Richard Cross” promises the recipient a cut of the inheritance left by Denis Thatcher, the late husband of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

Earlier this year, Britain’s Catholic Agency for Overseas Development warned that similar fraudulent letters were being sent out under its name, with return e-mails to be sent to [cafodworld@yahoo.com](mailto:cafodworld@yahoo.com), a false address. The fraudulent e-mail claimed to offer the chance to earn a weekly income while supporting “human development and social justice” work overseas.