

Detailed Summary of Case of Rev. Julio César Grassi, Drawn from Media Coverage and Legal Documents



Summary	Sources
<p>Grassi was a Salesian until 1991, when he became a priest of the Morón diocese. In 1993, he founded Fundación Felices los Niños (the Happy Children Foundation), aimed at rescuing street children. According to a news article, the foundation cared for 6,300 children in 17 homes nationwide from 1993 to 2002.</p> <p>On November 29, 2000, an anonymous complaint filed in the Juvenile Court of Morón accused Grassi of corrupting minors. The case lay dormant until 10/23/2002, when <i>Telenoche Investiga</i>, an investigative news show on Argentina's Channel 13, aired a program alleging Grassi's sexual abuse of five boys, ages 11 to 17. It included an interview with a young man, his face obscured, who said that Grassi performed oral sex on him in 1998, when he was 15. Within days, Grassi was arrested and charged with 17 counts of abuse of three boys, who were 9, 13, and 17 when the alleged incidents occurred. Grassi denied all the allegations.</p> <p>In November 2002, the executive committee of the Argentine bishops' conference issued a statement denouncing a "campaign" intended to "blur the image" of the Catholic Church and "cause society to lose its trust" in the institution. It warned against making "condemning judgments about individuals or institutions before a fair trial." Although the statement did not refer to a specific attack, some news analysts interpreted it as the bishops' response to public uproar about Grassi and the recently arrested Archbishop Storni. The Executive Committee was headed by Archbishop Karlic of Paraná and his first and second vice-presidents, Monsignor Miras of Rosario and Cardinal Bergoglio of Buenos Aires.</p> <p>Grassi's trial, one of the longest in Argentine history, began on 8/20/2008 and lasted for nine months, with testimony from 130 witnesses. On June 9, 2009, he was found guilty of two acts of aggravated sexual assault and corruption of minors in the case of "Gabriel." He was acquitted of 15 other counts of abuse of "Luis" and "Ezequiel." He was sentenced to 15 years in prison but allowed to remain free pending his appeal. He was prohibited from going alone to his Foundation's offices and children's homes but could enter them if accompanied by an individual whom he could designate.</p> <p>On June 20, 2009, 49 priests and 50 laypeople issued a statement opposing the court's decision to let Grassi remain free. They also criticized the "silence of ecclesial leaders before this case and others." The signers said, "We see that other bishops' conferences like Colombia's have spoken up in similar cases, and we do not</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priest Scandal Made a Television Appearance this Morning to Declare His Innocence. Father Grassi Ordered Detained for Abuse of Minors, Clarín, 10.24.2002 [Translation]; en Español • Statement of the Executive Committee of the Bishop Conference: The Church of Argentina Denounces a Campaign Made Against It, Clarín, 11.06.2002 [Translation]; en Español • "Queremos que intervengan", Página/12, 12.02.2003 • Golpes y navajazos para callar a Gabriel, by Darío Aranda, Página/12, 12.02.2003 • Don't Protect that Monster, by Miguel Jorquera, Página/12, 6.09.2006 [Translation]; en Español • Argentine Priest on Trial for Sexual Abuse, Associated Press, 8.19.2008 • Bishopric Distances Itself from Grassi's Words, La Nación, 8.21.2008 [Translation]; en Español • Grassi Trial Resumes, La Nación, 8.21.2008 [Translation]; en Español • The Very Long Case of Father Grassi, by Carlos Rodríguez, Página/12, 5.10.2009 [Translation]; en Español • Bergoglio Puts Father Grassi's Foundation under Microscope, by Sergio Rubín, Clarín, 5.22.2009 en Español • Archbishop Office's Clarification, Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Office of the Press, Buenos Aires, 5.26.2009 [Translation]; en Español • Grassi: "Bergoglio Never Let Go of My Hand", Infobae, 5.26.2009 [Translation]; en Español • Grassi Sentenced to 15 Years, Oral Court No. 1 of Morón, 6.09.2009 [Court web page] [Full text] [Brief summary] • The Church Takes Its Time, by Sergio Rubín, Clarín, 6.10.2009 [Translation]; en Español • Between Victim and Institutional Responsibility, by Washington Uranga, Página/12, 6.11.2009 [Translation]; en Español

understand your silence, that has the appearance of 'hushing up' and 'tolerance.'”

On September 14, 2010, the Criminal Appeals Court of Buenos Aires province denied Grassi's first appeal and confirmed the 15-year sentence. A few days later, the local court in Morón ruled again that Grassi could remain free until his conviction was final. He was prohibited only from entering the offices of the Happy Children Foundation. Subsequent attempts by the prosecutor and victims' attorneys to have Grassi detained were rejected twice, in November /2010 by the Appeal Court of Morón and in June 2011 by the Criminal Appeals Court of Buenos Aires province.

On March 9, 2012, the bishop of Morón, Luis Eichhorn, wrote to the Court of Morón, asking that Grassi be allowed to transfer back to the Morón diocese. (Grassi had been living somewhere in the diocese of San Justo.) Eichhorn asked specifically if Grassi could live in the town of Hurlingham, at LaBlanquita, a house with a swimming pool and large park, on the same block as the Happy Children headquarters, where Grassi had assaulted Gabriel. On March 10, /2012, the Court granted Bishop Eichhorn's request.

On April 24, 2013, the Criminal Court of Morón ruled affirmatively on a plaintiff's motion that Grassi had violated conditions of his freedom by referring to a victim in a TV interview. Grassi's lawyers announced they would appeal the decision. On September 19, 2013, the Supreme Court of Buenos Aires province rejected Grassi's appeal and ratified his 15-year sentence. On September 23, 2013, the Morón Criminal Court No.1 ordered that Grassi immediately go to prison to begin serving his sentence. In February 2014, Grassi filed a request from prison requesting to be free until the national Supreme Court reviews his case.

He remained in prison. In Novmeber 2016, he was convicted of using his Happy Children Foundation funds to pay the rent of his private home, for which he received an additional 2-year sentence.

In a March 2017 unanimous decision, the Supreme Court upheld the original 15-year sentence. A day later, the archdiocese of Morón stated that the canonical investigation of the allegations against Grassi is ongoing.

Because of his pre-trial detention, Grassi benefits from a "Two-for-One" sentencing law and will complete his sentence in 2026. In 2021, he'll be eligible for conditional release.

Father Grassi and Cardinal Bergoglio

Throughout the trial, Grassi claimed to be supported by numerous bishops, especially Cardinal Bergoglio, who, he said, "never let go of my hand [and] is always at my side." Though long a public supporter of the Happy Children Foundation, which ran homes in the Buenos Aires archdiocese, Bergoglio said little to defend Grassi publicly after his arrest. In a 2006 interview with *Veintitres* magazine, Bergoglio said that "justice will determine" Grassi's innocence, although "there is a media campaign against him, a condemnation in the media." In August 2008, a spokesperson for the Argentine bishops' conference, then headed by Bergoglio, said that Grassi's claim of the cardinal's backing was "an affirmation that he's making on his own." He added that the bishops "are respectful of the rule of law" and that innocence must be presumed until proven otherwise.

Indeed, after Grassi was found guilty in June 2009, Bergoglio secretly authorized an extensive critical examination of Grassi's prosecution and of the three original plaintiffs. In his capacity as president of the Argentine Bishops' conference, Bergoglio approved the hiring of a leading criminal defense lawyer and legal scholar, Marcelo Sancinetti, to do the private investigation.

The resulting study vigorously asserted Grassi's innocence and,

• [Priests Don't Forgive Grassi's Sins](#), *Críticas de la Argentina*, 6.20.2009 [Translation]

• [Father Grassi's 15-Year Sentence Is Confirmed](#), *Clarín*, 9.14.2010 [en Español](#)

• [Basis for Confirmation of 15-Year Sentence](#), Criminal Appeals Court of the Province of Buenos Aires, 9.15.2010 [[Court web page](#)] [[Full text](#)]

• [Grassi Can Remain Free Pending Appeal](#), Oral Court No. 1 of Morón, 9.20.2010 [[Court web page](#)] [[Full text](#)]

• [New Ruling: Grassi a Free Man](#), *La Nación*, 9.20.2010 [Translation]; [en Español](#)

• [Demand for Grassi's Detention Is Rejected](#), Criminal Chamber of Morón, 11.09.2010 [[Court web page](#)] [[Full text](#)]

• [New Demand for Grassi's Detention Is Rejected](#), Criminal Appeals Court of Buenos Aires, 6.28.2011 [[Court web page](#)] [[Full text](#)]

• [The Church Edited a Book in Support of Priest Grassi: Reportedly Distributed Among Various Judges for "Lobbying"](#), *Clarín*, 12.17.2011 [Translation]; [en Español](#)

• [Convicted Priest Has a Penpal: The Bishops' Conference of Argentina Commissioned a Book to Defend Father Julio César Grassi](#), by Carlos Rodríguez, *Página/12*, 12.17.2011 [Translation]; [en Español](#)

• [I Hope It Isn't True](#), Op-Ed by Daniel Pliner, *La Nación*, 12.20.2011 [Translation]; [en Español](#)

• [Priest Julio César Grassi to Remain under House Arrest](#), *Buenos Aires Herald*, 3.08.2012

• [Court Annuls Priest Grassi's House Arrest](#), *Buenos Aires Herald*, 6.01.2012

• [A Letter for Grassi](#), by Carlos Rodríguez, *Página/12*, 6.03.2012 [Translation]; [en Español](#)

• [What Can and Can't Change after the Election of the Argentine Cardinal](#), Juan Cruz Esquivel Interview Excerpt, *Página/12*, 3.14.2013 [Translation]; [en Español](#)

• [Humility and Solemnity Won't Suffice](#), Mallimaci Interview Excerpt, *Página/12*, 3.17.2013 [Translation]; [en Español](#)

• [Pope Francis Was Often Quiet on Argentine Sex Abuse Cases As Archbishop](#), by Nick Miroff, *Washington Post*, 3.18.2013

• [Bergoglio Accused of Having Protected Father Grassi](#), *La Prensa*, 3.20.2013 [Translation]; [en Español](#)

• [Hard Questions about Francis in Argentina and a Lesson from Chile](#), by John L. Allen, *National Catholic Reporter*, 4.12.2013

• [Confirmation of Morón Court's Verdict](#), Criminal Appeals Court of Buenos Aires, 4.23.2013 [[Court web page](#)] [[Full Text](#)]

• [El obispado de Morón expresa sus "dudas" sobre la culpabilidad de Grassi](#), *Infojus Noticias*, 4.24.2013

• [Denuncian Lobby de Grassi Ante La Corte Bonaerense y El Vaticano](#), by Federico Trofelli, *Tiempo Argentino*, 9.15.2013

• [15-Year Prison Term for Grassi Confirmed](#), *Buenos Aires Herald*, 9.19.2013

• [Río Negro Bishop Defended Priest; Said "He's Completely Innocent"](#), *Diario La Prensa*, 9.19.2013 [Translation]; [en Español](#)

according to a Página/12 report, denied even the prevalence of child sexual abuse itself. It reportedly was circulated to judges who had yet to make determinations in the case. The first volume, with 423 pages, debunked the accusations of "Ezequiel," of which Grassi was acquitted; volume two, with 646 pages, attacked the credibility of "Gabriel," of whose abuse Grassi was convicted. As of spring 2013, a third volume had been produced, and a fourth and final volume was expected.

The bishops' commissioned exoneration of Grassi was revealed in December 2011 by Juan Pablo Gallego, an attorney for the Committee for Oversight and Implementation of International Conventions for Children's Rights, who had represented the plaintiffs at the trial. Gallego called the study a "scandalous instance of lobbying and exerting pressure on the Court" and accused the bishops of "further hindering a process that has outrageously granted the condemned priest a situation of almost unthinkable freedom."

Grassi remained free pending appeal until September 2013, when his second appeal was rejected by the provincial court, and the Morón Criminal Court No.1 ordered that he finally go to prison.

• [Priest Grassi Sent to Prison, Court Confirms 15-Year Sentence](#), Buenos Aires Herald, 9.23.2013

• [Argentine Priest Jailed for Sex Abuse](#), by Shane Romig, Wall Street Journal, 9.24.2013

• [Audio, Court Testimony, "Gabriel,"](#) diarioveloz.com, 9.29.2013 [audio]

• [Cronología del caso Grassi](#), taringa.net, 9.30.2013

• [Argentine Priest Serving Time for Sex Abuse Loses Bid for Freedom Pending Appeal](#), Global News, 12.29.13

• [Grassi insiste con pedir su excarcelación](#), Tiempo Argentino, 2.22.14

• [Causa Padre Grassi](#), website with links to selected articles and documents; contends that the allegations against Grassi are slanders

• [Uno por uno, los 9 curas que ya fueron condenados por abusar de menores en Argentina](#), Clarín, 9.6.2017

• [El Padre Grassi suma dos años de condena por malversación de fondos](#), La Nacion, 11.14.2017

• [La Corte Suprema confirmó la condena de 15 años de prisión al cura Julio César Grassi](#), Infobae, 3.21.2017

• [Comunicado del Obispado de Morón sobre la situación canónica del sacerdote Julio César Grassi](#), Obispado de Morón, 3.21.2017

• [El Obispado de Morón aseguró que la situación de Grassi depende de lo que disponga el Vaticano](#), La Gaceta, 3.22.2017

• [Morón recortó la pena del padre Grassi](#), La Nacion, 4.10.2017

